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"There's that Big One Rising Again"—*Page 97.*

Sydney Carteret
RANCHER

By HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of "Lorimer of the Northwest," "Alton of Somasco," "Thurston of Orchard Valley," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colors

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Sydney Carteret: Rancher

CHAPTER I

IN THE RANGES

THERE was a bitter wind abroad, and the ragged pines that ran up in thinning ranks toward the gleaming snow were wailing dolefully, when three men wearily clambered down the side of a spur of the rugged Gold Range in British Columbia. Two of them carried Winchester rifles, and, though they were more or less ragged, their garments were of different cut and fabric from those of their companion, who bore a Canadian grub-hoe on his shoulder. This instrument, which is intended for cutting through the roots of trees, bears a strong resemblance to a mountaineer's ice-ax, and for this purpose the man had used it, for the party had been high up among the snow. He was a rancher from a neighboring valley, whom the others had hired as guide. Stopping presently he pointed to a thin wisp of blue smoke that streamed out from among the climbing pines some distance below them.

"The Siwash has got back, and that's good," he said. "I had a kind of feeling that I didn't want to hustle and make a fire and cook to-night. Now, if you'll sit down and take a smoke, I'll prospect for a way to get down to camp."

The man nearest him laughed.

"Very well. The trouble is, though, if I once get down somebody will certainly have to pull me up."

He sat down heavily, and took out his pipe when the rancher plodded away, while his companion stretched himself out full length among the stones beside him. They were not nice stones to lie upon, for they were ragged and sharp of angle, having been rent by frost from the scarped shoulders of the mighty peaks above, but both the men were too weary to be particular. They had been on foot since early morning, scrambling over talus and moraine, and floundering knee-deep in snow, but their rifles were as clean as when they left camp. Neither of them had fired a shot that day, and they had had much the same fortune during the entire fortnight they had spent upon the range. They had, however, torn their clothes to tatters and their thick boots were dropping off their feet. One of them was further troubled with chilblains, and the other's hands had split with the frost, as the result of lying out all night in a fog high up among the peaks. Now a fine rain was falling, and they were very weary and chilled to the bone.

They were naturally Englishmen, for the average Canadian of the Pacific Slope, in spite of his skill with the rifle, does not, as a rule, take kindly to amusements of that description. For one thing, he is generally too busy to think of amusing himself at all, and though now and then he will cheerfully endure hardships that in all probability would kill the city-bred, it is only when he goes out on the gold trail and there is a prospect of making a few dollars at the end of it.

The two had met by accident at a wooden hotel a couple of weeks earlier, and, as one of them had nothing to do and the other desired to divert his mind from a matter that he wished to postpone, they had gone up into the ranges together.

In the meanwhile their guide was cautiously moving along the edge of the slope of rock that dropped almost precipitously not far from them. His figure project-

ed dimly against the sea of drifting mist that crawled up the opposite hillside out of what seemed to be a fathomless hollow. Here and there a somber spire or ragged branch rose out of the vapor, and the roar of a river came up with a curious rhythmic cadence from very far below. Above, there were scarped slopes which even the sturdy pines could not climb, more mist trails, ragged cloud-banks, and odd blinks of towering snow.

As he sat quietly smoking, Sydney Jardine Carteret—Jardine was his mother's family name—gazed at it all with contemplative eyes. He had not been endued with the artistic temperament, but the savage, almost appalling, grandeur of the desolation in which he had spent the last two weeks had, as he would have expressed it, got hold of him. This was characteristic, for he generally used very simple colloquial English, and few of his friends credited him with the possession of many ideas. He was then about twenty-six years of age, and looked exactly what he was—a healthy, well-brought-up young Englishman, who hitherto had taken life somewhat easily.

Presently he took his pipe from his mouth, and indicated the mountains vaguely with the stem of it.

"Never saw anything quite like this," he declared. " Reminds one of Sutherland and Norway—been there fishing—and you get something of the same kind in the Tyrol; but they're somehow smaller and smoother. This gives you the idea of raw nature, and you can almost persuade yourself that nobody has ever been up here before. Anyway, you don't run up against a tourist at every corner. That last smashed forest was —tremendous."

It was the best word he could think of, and, feeling rather pleased with it, he replaced his pipe in his mouth. His thoughts, however, dwelt upon the scene of desolation that had taken him and his companions several

hours of arduous toil to skirt. It was a great hollow in the range, where the frost-loosened hillside had slipped down upon the forest; and Carteret had gazed with wide-eyed wonder at the long swath of wreckage where broken rock and stately trees lay piled in tumultuous ruin with the young saplings already springing up between.

"Yes," he added, "it's all uncommonly fine. In fact, I've had a feeling the last day or two that I should like to live here altogether."

His companion laughed.

"I'm rather sorry that I shall probably have to do so. That's why I came out, though I don't know what I shall turn to, unless I buy a ranch. In the meanwhile I'm getting a little tired of wandering about these ranges, and I almost think I'll head for the settlements, if the Indian you sent for your letters can show me a practicable trail."

Just then their guide's voice reached them.

"I guess we could get down here," he called. "I'll wait for you."

It did not look an easy way when they joined him, but they contrived to scramble down, lowering themselves in places by the stems of little twisted pines and clumps of juniper, until they reached a level plateau several hundred feet below. A tent stood near one end of this, with a fire of branches burning outside of it between two small fir logs. The copper-skinned Siwash, who was busy beside the fire, handed Carteret a packet tied up in a strip of hide. Carteret took it from him and tossed it into the tent. It evidently contained the letters that he had sent the Indian for, but he was very wet and cold and tired, and it was too dark to read. Besides, he felt reasonably sure that there was nothing of importance in the correspondence. In this, however, he was wrong.

A few minutes later the Indian laid out a simple

"Why should I?" he had retorted sharply.

Jim, he remembered, had answered him at unusual length and with what was in his case unusual candor. "To begin with, it wouldn't commit you to anything. You have had one or two invitations, and they merely suggest that you should go over for a month or two of fishing and shooting. I've no doubt that tracking mountain sheep would prove quite as interesting as killing Norwegian salmon, and British Columbia is as easy to reach as some of the places you have been talking of going to. To proceed, there's no reason why you shouldn't like the girl, and it would certainly be a very good thing if you did. You see, you have no profession, and—since the return from your mother's private estate is inconsiderable —you practically depend on what I pay you out of the business, while as a matter of fact the extension of the branches of the big houses and the general drift of modern finance has given the proprietors of the old-fashioned private banks something to think about. I don't mind admitting that we're not an exception."

Sydney had fancied that there was a certain anxiety behind his brother's words; and soon afterward, chiefly because he was becoming weary of his importunities, he set out for Canada on what he had decided should really be neither more nor less than a fishing and shooting trip. It was, however, clear that he must spend at least a week or two with his Canadian relatives; and, as he fancied that Miss Carteret probably had some idea of the situation, it was with no sense of pleasurable anticipation that he looked forward to meeting her. If she did know, he said to himself, the whole thing would be particularly awkward for both of them. With that he endeavored to drive the matter from his thoughts. However, there was at the back of his mind another hazy idea which his brother's words had suggested, and he turned toward their guide.

"Can you tell me anything about ranching, Brodie?" he asked. "How much does one of those half-cleared places cost, and how do you make it pay?"

Brodie laughed.

"Well," he said, "it isn't quite easy, but one way or another you can get a living out of one. You might get a place with a house on it in one of these valleys for about fifteen hundred dollars—in fact, I know a man who'd sell out for a thousand dollars—but, unless you could spend about twice as much in stock and clearing the land, you'd have to go mighty slow for a year or two. You'd have to put in most of your time slashing, and all the produce you could raise and sell wouldn't keep you."

"Then how do you live?" asked Sydney.

"Go out and work every now and then—chop trees for somebody else, cut trails for the Government, build bridges, take a spell railroading. A live man can get two dollars and a half a day. Two or three months at that rate will see him through the rest of the year."

"And the stock?"

"They just run in the bush while you are away. If you're going to be a long while you sell them."

"If you had three or four times as much money as you mentioned, you could stay on the place and make something out of it?"

"Oh, yes," replied Brodie, "I guess you could."

Sydney asked no more questions. He felt that he had got at the gist of the matter, and he had, in fact, been supplied with a reasonably accurate exposition of the small rancher's situation. It left him thoughtful, for the little he had seen of the country had appealed to him, and he had realized of late that he was becoming somewhat tired of a purposeless life. He had a vigorous body and a steady nerve and eye, besides some general knowledge of horses and farming stock. He was a good shot, something of a yachtsman, and could cast

a long-range fly, but that, as he admitted, was about the extent of his capacities. After all, he felt, they could, perhaps, be turned to some account on the Pacific Slope of western Canada. Jim had clearly been a little anxious about his future, and it was quite out of the question that he should marry Miss Carteret—even if she would have him, which appeared distinctly doubtful—merely for her money.

By and by the rain ceased, and when Carteret next glanced out of the tent door he could see a sharp sickle moon shining behind a rigid branch, and the freshening wind brought in the roar of a distant river and the organ-like harmonies of the pines. Though he was not a man of much imagination, it reacted upon him and made him restless, as something in the savage grandeur of the country had already done. This was, perhaps, not very astonishing, for he was of somewhat primitive nature, and he was listening then to the oldest music in the world—the roar of water and the song of the brave black pines.

It was their kingdom he had entered, one for which they grimly fought with the elemental forces, for the pines are the guardians of the wilderness, creeping of all the trees closest up to the frozen tundra beside the Polar Sea and highest toward the limits of eternal snow. The broad-leafed maples cling to the sheltered valleys, blazoned with gold and purple in the fall—for they like good land—but the pines climb heavenward by dizzy ledge and awful hollow, scourged by icy blasts, smothered in frozen snow, and uplift their stately spires amidst the stress of conflict. The theme of the wild songs they sing on the high divide is one of effort and victory.

Carteret heard it, and, half recognizing it, wondered vaguely what was wrong with him. Suddenly a fresh sound broke stridently in upon the deep-toned wailing of the wind among the branches.

"Big rock broke loose," the guide explained. "No call to worry. It's not coming this way."

The sound grew louder until Carteret could distinguish the rending and smashing of timber. Then there was a crash that suggested the impact of a gigantic steam hammer, as the rock shattered some jutting ledge in its career. After that there was a gradually dying roar, and by contrast deep silence again.

"Quite a few of them have been coming down lately," remarked Brodie. "Anyway, since we're to hit the trail at sunup, I'm going to sleep."

He drew his blanket higher over him; Carteret stretched himself out; and in a few minutes only the song of the pines, that rose and fell in long pulsations, disturbed the stillness of the little tent.

CHAPTER II

THE LANDSLIDE

EARLY on the following morning Carteret said good-by to Hilton, who was starting for the nearest settlement, on the verge of the plateau where a wide gully which they had descended on the previous evening ran almost straight down into the climbing forest. Carteret possessed one useful if not exactly common gift—that of readily making friends; and though they had met only by chance a week or two earlier, his companion seemed sorry to part with him. He was not the only casual acquaintance who had discovered that there was something very likable in Sydney Carteret.

"It's a pity we have to separate," he said. "Anyway, if I can find a place that takes my fancy in the Okanagan country you must try to get over and see it before you go away. I suppose a letter would find you at the ranch you spoke of? It's in one of these valleys, isn't it?"

Sydney took from his pocket a shooting register diary with a pencil attached to it, and wrote an address across a blank leaf. The little book was nicely bound, and had his name stamped on the back of it. He laughed as he handed it to Hilton.

"There's scarcely an entry in it, and it seems a pity to tear the thing," he said. "Suppose you take it as a keepsake."

Hilton thanked him and placed the book in a canvas satchel; and after they had shaken hands Carteret watched him and the Indian clamber down the hollow until they diminished to little half-seen figures that moved very slowly on the steep-pitched slope of stones. Then he turned to Brodie.

"One would wonder where all these stones came from."

The rancher pointed upward toward a fold in the range close up beneath a peak that gleamed coldly white against the clean blue of the morning sky.

"The frost splits the rock up yonder, and when the thaw comes the snow brings it down," he explained. "From the looks of the place I figure that a big slide comes along every little while. As the sun gets hotter the thaw line climbs higher. Of course you can have a slide most anywhere, but this place is a kind of natural channel; I guess the inhabitants would call it a coulée."

Carteret had seen enough of Norway and the Highland corries to understand this, and he asked no more questions as they went back to camp. He already had decided to set out that morning for the ranch which he understood the Canadian Carteret, who was fond of fishing, had bought and renovated for a summer house. He had not gone with Hilton because their paths branched off after the first mile or two. It took Brodie some time, however, to clean up their cooking utensils and make up the light tent and their belongings into packs that could be strapped upon their shoulders, and Hilton had been gone about an hour when they commenced the march.

It was a clear morning, and a subtly sweet fragrance stole out from among the somber pines as the gleaming moisture on them dried, but Carteret scarcely noticed that or the exhilarating quality of the mountain air. He was too busy looking for the smoothest places as they stumbled and floundered down hill over the rag-

ged stones. These were of all sizes, and in spite of his precautions he barked his shins cruelly against some of them. It would, he felt, not have been quite so bad had the stones remained still, but every now and then a mass of them would slide away beneath his feet, while some of those behind came rolling down after him. They made some progress, however; and, after all, this was easier traveling than it would have been through the climbing bush, where wind-wrecked trees lay piled upon one another in tangled confusion, and where there were brakes of thorny undergrowth through which one could scarcely scramble.

By and by the hollow grew deeper. An almost vertical wall of rock rose above one side of it, and the scarped slope on the other side became very steep. Then a stream, which fell in lace-like cascades from the forest high above them, added to their difficulties, for it twisted about among the stones and continuously had to be waded, while the water was icy cold. At length Carteret, who was somewhat heavily loaded, sat down upon a stone, and taking out his pipe ruefully regarded his dripping and tattered boots. They failed to cover his badly galled feet, and he was very doubtful whether they would hold together until he reached the valley. His companion's boots were in no better repair, but he, at least, seemed perfectly fresh, though he had carried almost twice as much as Carteret. This rather annoyed the latter, who, among his other accomplishments, was a good amateur mountaineer. He had, however, not been accustomed to walking up and down precipitous hillsides and scrambling through choked-up forests, with two big blankets and a small sack of flour and canned goods upon his shoulders, as the smaller bush ranchers not infrequently do.

"This kind of thing doesn't seem to have much effect on you," he said.

"You want to be raised to it," laughed Brodie. "You

can tell a man from the ranges by the way he lifts his feet. It's considerably easier than chopping, anyway."

"Then," declared Carteret, "I don't think chopping would agree with me. By the way, did you notice where I put that packet the Indian brought me?"

"In the breast of your blue shirt. The one you changed this morning."

Carteret lighted his pipe. The packet contained one or two letters from England which he had not read yet, but he remembered that the shirt was in the middle of the pack that it had taken him and Brodie some time and trouble to make up, and he decided that as they were, no doubt, not important he would not trouble about them in the meanwhile. At the moment, the thing that worried him most was the state of his boots.

"Well," he said, "I'm going to rest here until I smoke out this pipe."

They talked about different matters, and half an hour had almost slipped away when there was a curious rumbling, droning sound overhead. Brodie looked up sharply.

"I don't like that," he said.

Carteret sat still for a moment. He had never heard anything exactly like that sound before, but it vaguely reminded him of the roar of a heavy ground-sea upon a pebble beach, or the din one of the great freight-trains makes when crossing a wooden bridge. One thing, however, was certain. It was rapidly drawing nearer. Brodie sprang to his feet.

"We have got to get out of this right now!" he exclaimed.

Carteret rose hastily and flung a swift glance about him. As far as he could see there was no means of carrying out his guide's suggestion. The rock on one side of them was now almost vertical and perfectly

smooth, while that on the other side, though ragged and broken, appeared unscalable.

"It opens up lower down!" cried Brodie. "We want to get there—first!"

Carteret had no doubt whatever that they did. He understood now that an overwhelming rush of snow or soil and frost-split rock was charging down the coulée, and it seemed eminently desirable that they should climb out of the latter before the mass overtook them. In another moment he was running his hardest down the slope, tearing savagely at the deerhide pack-straps, and failing to get them loose. Then he thought of his hunting knife, but he stumbled as he snatched it out of its sheath, and it flew out of his hand. He could not see just where it fell, and he dare not stop to look for it, for the memory of the smashed forest which he had skirted a few days earlier was horribly distinct.

In the meanwhile the roar behind him had swelled into a cataclysm of sound. The rocks seemed to ring with it, and the tremendous resonance became bewildering. He fancied that he could hear great stones and climbing pines smash and crumple before the mad downward rush of thousands of tons of rock and snow. The sweat of tense effort dripped from him, his pack grew horribly heavy and promised to overbalance him, and he gasped with distress as he ran. A dozen yards away Brodie was staggering and stumbling among the stones ahead of him, but at last he swung around and ran straight toward one almost upright ascent.

"We have got to get up—and do it now!" he gasped.

Carteret was beside him in a moment or two, and though he recognized the need for haste he swept a careful glance along the wall of rock in front of him. Although he was not accustomed to running for his life among sliding stones, he was a good climber, and he fancied that he could get up.

"Get your foot in that cranny, and work up slant-

ways to the ledge!" cried Brodie; and thrusting a hand into another crevice a few yards away Carteret swung himself up.

The effort of the next few minutes taxed all his strength, but he was very cool and careful now. Indeed, Sydney Carteret was never flurried when he was reasonably sure of his ground and knew just what he had to do. That it might happen to be difficult did not matter so long as the task was clear and definite. After all, this was something in his favor, for the men who can collectedly face a harrowing uncertainty are in a general way signally scarce.

Once or twice, when he could find no foothold whatever, he drew himself up by the muscles of his lower arms, and then with a toe merely pressed against the smooth rock lifted his body another yard or so by a turn of his elbows, though except to a gymnast this is a difficult feat. The need, however, was urgent, and he succeeded in reaching a very narrow ledge. Crawling along this he saw his companion's hand and arm flung up across the rock. Then there was a hoarse cry, a soft clatter of worn leather on stone, and the clinging hand began to slip away.

Carteret flung himself down full length upon the ledge and clutched the shoulder of the man below. He saw a tense, white face close beneath him, with an agony of appeal in its eyes, and he braced himself for an effort. The ledge was smooth, there was no hold for his knees or toes, and it was unpleasantly evident from the strain on his arm that the man he had seized could find nothing to rest his foot upon on the rock below. It was, however, clear to Carteret that he must have had his toes in some cranny when he had reached up to the ledge, and that having drawn them out in an attempt to crawl up he had now failed to find the crevice again.

"Brace your knees against the stone, and get your

shoulders up! Then fling your other arm on to the ledge!" he cried.

It did not seem possible that Brodie could hear him, for the hollow was filled with a tremendous din, but it was evident that, perhaps subconsciously, he grasped the drift of the instructions, and the tension on Carteret's arm became almost unendurable. He began to slip forward, and while the sweat dripped from him he felt the veins on his forehead swell to the bursting point. It was no great distance to the ground below, but it was not the fall that caused him most alarm, for it seemed to him that there could be no escape from the avalanche if they once dropped back into the gorge.

Brodie apparently found it impossible to get his other arm upon the ledge, and Carteret slipped forward a little farther, bruising his knees painfully upon the stone. It seemed that he must be drawn bodily over the edge, but it never occurred to him that he could loose his hold and let Brodie go.

He was as capable as most men are of getting flurried and doing a foolish thing when suddenly called on to make a difficult choice, and, indeed, he made this fact clear not long afterward; but it was, at least, characteristic that as he lay upon the ledge he did not recognize that any choice was open to him. There was a vein of almost unreasoning tenacity in his nature, and when he had made up his mind and decided, wisely or the reverse, on a certain course he usually carried that decision out. As they say in the Mountain Province, he stayed with it. Just then he recognized only that he must pull his companion up or go over with him.

How long the tense effort lasted he did not know, but when every muscle and tendon in his vigorous body ached beneath the weight on it, Brodie managed to get his other arm upon the ledge. Then Carteret made a last determined effort, and his companion scrambled up. They were on their feet in another

moment, and, for the ascent was easier higher up, had clambered up a hundred yards or so when a great mass of white and brown poured down the hollow. Shattered trees projected out of it, great rocks churned and smashed together in its midst, and it swept on like a giant wave. Through the tremendous uproar the two men could hear the strident scream of heavy stones ground to powder or scoring deep grooves in the hard rock, and the duller sound of rending timber. They stood still, with the perspiration dripping from them, awestruck and bewildered, with dry lips and unwavering eyes, watching the mass of snow and soil and wreckage sweep past below. There seemed to be thousands of tons of it.

It surged tumultuously by, and when a rush of great stones swept the gully in the wake of it, and the din grew fainter far down amidst the forest, the two men, saying nothing, once more climbed the steep scarp of hillside. They had a horror of that gully, and wanted to get as far as possible away from it.

It was at least a quarter of an hour later when they sat down among the pines, and Brodie turned to Carteret with a curious look in his eyes.

"It's about the biggest landslide I've seen yet, and if you hadn't held on to me it's a sure thing I'd have been left there to wait for it with a broken rib or leg." He paused, and added awkwardly, "I want to say that if there's anything I can do to get even, now or at any other time, you have only to tell me."

"Thanks," said Carteret with a smile; "as it happens, I don't think there is." Then an unpleasant idea occurred to him. "I suppose it's not likely that Hilton and the Indian could have been overtaken by the slide?"

"They'd have been quite a way from it," Brodie assured him. "Heading as they were for Morland, where the trail to the railroad begins, they'd have

turned off and kept along the range most an hour ago, and that slide would go straight down."

The latter fact was evident to Carteret, and he felt relieved; but it was some minutes before he got upon his feet again.

The march before them proved to be an arduous one, but two days later they reached a little settlement on the shore of a lake. It consisted of a few log houses and a frame store with a veranda in front of it, which suggested that there were ranches in the vicinity, and Brodie said that as a stage from the railroad called there twice a week it was considered a place of some importance.

Carteret felt embarrassed as he limped into it in the afternoon with his garments badly torn and his boots just hanging on his feet, for one or two women stood in the open doorways, and he had been fastidious about his attire in England. There was, however, no help for it, and with Brodie, who was at least as ragged, plodding behind him, he made for the store. As he drew nearer the latter he was disconcerted to notice that a young lady was standing in the shadow on the veranda and apparently watching him and his companion with what he felt very undesirable interest.

She was different from the others, and he did not think she could be the wife of a bush rancher or chopper. For one thing, there was an unmistakable air of refinement about her, and he fancied that the simple white hat, which he at once decided became her wonderfully well, must have come from Winnipeg or Vancouver, since it certainly could not have been made in the bush. The rest of her attire conveyed the same impression, though he was rather puzzled by the skirt. Its appearance somehow suggested that it had been meant for riding, but it differed in several ways from an English habit. He was, while becoming more and more conscious of his own disarray, sorry that he

could not see her face very clearly, but she disappeared before he reached the store. Then he noticed that a Cayuse pony with one knee bleeding was tethered at the side of the veranda, and he wondered whether it belonged to the girl, but he saw that it was in any case not provided with a side-saddle.

He walked into the store and spent some time fitting himself and Brodie out with new boots and one or two new garments. The only kind the storekeeper had, however, were made of the blue duck which is commonly worn by the workmen throughout that country, and Brodie, who laughed as they put them on, assured him that he now looked very much like a bush chopper.

"It doesn't matter," replied Sydney. "You told me we should make Carteret's ranch to-morrow night, and I've no doubt I can get my things sent on from the other place up the line. It wouldn't be a bad idea to write for them from here."

The storekeeper, who had heard that they were going down the lake, broke in just then.

"The stage went out an hour or two ago, and it will be four days before it comes through again," he said. "You would save time if you mailed your letters at Gayton's Landing to-morrow."

Carteret decided to wait, and the fact that he did so had results of some importance to himself and others. Had he written then it would have rendered the course he adopted shortly afterward impossible. He asked the storekeeper if he could supply them with a meal, as they wished to go on as soon as possible, and while it was being got ready Brodie strolled away to hire a canoe.

CHAPTER III

A CRUSHING BLOW

SYDNEY was lying in an easy chair on the veranda after a much better meal than any he had enjoyed for the last two weeks, when Brodie, who had been talking to the storekeeper, came up to him.

"I've been to look at a span of young working oxen that a man here wants to sell, but he's camping out with the rest of the boys chopping a trail about a league back in the bush. I'd like to go along and talk to him, but there's no reason why you shouldn't go on to the hotel near the foot of the lake. They'd give you supper and put you up if you get that far before I catch up with you. Anyway, if you got tired you could pull out somewhere and wait until I came along."

Sydney said that he would start as soon as he had smoked one pipe. Then he remembered the package of letters.

"Where did you put my pack?" he asked.

"It's in the canoe," answered Brodie. "You'll see three or four lying at the landing. It's the first of them."

Sydney laughed.

"This is the second or third time I meant to read those letters and something prevented it. Anyway, I don't suppose they matter."

He lighted his pipe when Brodie left him, and lay back in his chair without in the least troubling him-

self about his correspondence. This was significant, for there are probably very few of the men and women one comes across in conventional society who would like to put off the reading of their letters for two whole days. Most have cares, and some have debts, while a few, and they are to be envied, have somebody who in their absence thinks of them tenderly. Sydney was, however, fortunate in that he owed nobody anything, and had no anxieties, which was, perhaps, one result of the fact that he scarcely fancied there was any girl in England who cared very much what became of him.

He was physically weary after his long march, but, apart from that, he was more or less contented with himself and the rest of the world. The only thing that rather troubled him was the thought of his approaching meeting with Miss Carteret, but as it seemed after all possible that she might not know what had brought him there he did not mean to worry about it beforehand. In any case, he said to himself, his real reason for coming had been to get a little shooting and mountain climbing, and to be able to tell Jim that he had seen the girl. That, and he smiled as he thought of it, would put an end to the matter.

In the meanwhile there drifted about him the sweet smell of freshly-split cedar shingles and the heavy, honey-like odors that emanated from the pines beneath the hot afternoon sunshine, and he found the drowsy, fragrant air pleasant. Through an opening between the somber ranks of trees he could see the wide lake gleaming like a silver mirror among its enfolding hills, and high above it the cold shimmer of never-melting snow etched against the cloudless blue. Once more he felt that this must be a good country in which to live and do something; and the thought crept into his mind that a man with thews and sinews might perhaps find raising cattle, planting fruitful orchards, or hewing oatfields out of the conifers, as interesting as

killing pheasants, playing bridge, or even driving a motor along dusty highroads at a speed in excess of the legal limit, which, so far, had seemed the only occupations for which he was fitted. Jim did not need him at the bank, and, what was more, evidently did not want him there; he had signally failed to get an Oxford degree; and he admitted that he was debarred from taking any part in politics by the lack of necessary brains, although this was, perhaps, suggestive of short-sightedness as well as modesty.

He had almost finished his pipe when the girl he had noticed before walked out of the store, and he rose in some astonishment when it became evident that she meant to address him. He had never seen her until about an hour ago, but he said to himself that British Columbia was no doubt an unconventional country.

"You are going down the lake?" she asked.

"I am," admitted Sydney; and then, feeling that this was rather abrupt, he added lamely, "In fact I'm going in the next few minutes."

The girl seemed to be studying him, and he stood there, half amused but at the same time not quite comfortable. He was not a remarkably diffident man, but as he was going to Carteret's ranch, which he understood was not very far away, it did not seem advisable to become mixed up in anything of the nature of an adventure. He admitted, however, that the girl's manner was reassuring and did not suggest anything of the kind. There was a certain repose, and what he called style, about her. She had rather attractive gray eyes, a clear skin delicately touched by the sun, and hair that was slightly darker than golden and was full of warm gleams. Her dress he had already noticed, but now he was more sure that it became her. It was, however, her voice that made the greatest impression, for he had discovered that the voice is a more reliable

guide to a woman's station and education than either her face or her figure.

"I'm in somewhat of a difficulty," she said. "May I explain?"

"Of course," answered Sydney.

"I rode in from a ranch near the foot of the lake to send off some letters by the stage, and in coming down a slope of rock—in places the trail is dreadful—my Cayuse fell and lamed himself badly. The trouble is that as the ranch is nearly nine miles from here, I don't quite know how to get back. It's too far to walk."

"Yes," assented Sydney, who did not wish to go any farther until he was more sure of his ground, "it's certainly too far for you to walk. Can't you hire a horse about here, or get somebody to drive you?"

"No," replied the girl; "I've tried. They have only working oxen, and I can't get anybody to paddle me down the lake, because all the men belonging to the place are back in the bush chopping a new trail. I had almost made up my mind to go down the lake alone; but I find that you have hired the only available canoes. The other two belong to some of the choppers who live across the lake, and the storekeeper tells me that they are going back to-night."

Sydney now felt reasonably sure that she had given him a lead.

"In that case I don't suppose you would resent it if I offered to take you down?" he inquired. "Of course," he added, "the canoe is at your service if you prefer to go alone. I could wait and go on with my guide in the evening."

He saw a faint smile creep into the girl's eyes.

"Thank you," she said. "It would be too bad to turn you out, and, besides, I can get a horse at a place about six miles down the lake. There isn't a trail to it from here."

"I'll get ready now," responded Sydney; and a few minutes later they were walking together down the short trail to the lake.

When they reached it the girl glanced at the canoe.

"Hadn't you better cut a few spruce twigs to kneel on?" she suggested; and then added, "Perhaps, if you spread out that pack it would do."

"You'll want a seat of some kind," said Sydney. "I'll go for the twigs."

He cut off a little bundle of them with his pocket-knife, and was glad of them afterward, though in the meantime he had no clear idea as to why they should be wanted. Then he ran the canoe in, and thrust her off when the girl had taken her place. The craft was about fourteen feet long and not much more than two feet wide, and had been finely hewn and modeled by a Siwash Indian out of a single log. Sydney, kneeling in the stern on the spruce twigs, dipped the single-ended paddle, and the canoe slid forward readily; but, as he had expected, she would not go straight, and to remedy this he dipped the paddle on the other side, which entailed an awkward swing of his body, and resulted in a somewhat erratic movement of the craft. To make things worse, a little breeze was blowing up the lake, and it caught the high bow and blew it farther round each time she fell off her course. Sydney, however, persevered for a while, though he was getting very hot and was becoming uneasily conscious that his companion, who was facing aft, was watching him with amusement.

This supposition was quite correct, but she had also been studying him with a certain curiosity, and, in spite of his blue duck garments and his somewhat dilapidated wide gray hat, she had no doubt that he was a young man who had been accustomed to the smoother side of life in the old country. He was, she decided, certainly English, and she liked the fair-skinned,

straight-limbed type, of which he was a characteristic specimen. There was candor and just a hint of resolution in his face, which was, while a pleasant one in its way, by no means striking.

"Aren't you used to the water?" she asked at length.

It must be admitted that Sydney was slightly nettled by the innocent question. He was young enough to feel a certain pride in his physical prowess, and he had pulled a good oar at Oxford and had driven stumpy dingeys over short, splashing seas. Unfortunately, however, he had never until the present handled a Siwash canoe, and there was no doubt that the one in question would not go straight.

"I believe I know something about it," he asserted. "At least, I have rowed in my time, and done some canoeing on English rivers. I had then, however, a long double-ended paddle which you could dip on either side alternately."

His companion laughed.

"This," she explained, "is different. You must paddle on one side close to the stern. When you have nearly finished the stroke let the blade turn a little and make a back-feather under water. It really isn't difficult."

Sydney tried it, and the canoe stopped dead until her high bow caught the wind.

"I'm afraid I can't agree with your last remark," he said ruefully.

"You must not back-feather quite so much."

Sydney scarcely made the feather at all the next stroke, and the craft swung round so that it took him half a minute's vigorous splashing to get her on her course again.

"I don't think that's very much better," he admitted.

"Try again," encouraged the girl. "Don't twist the blade so sharply."

This time the canoe once more turned partly round,

and Sydney's face grew red; but he contrived to get her straight again, and he fancied a quarter of an hour later that he had made about four hundred yards. He was, at any rate, quite certain that his hands were getting hot and sore.

"There's another paddle. Shall I help you?" his companion suggested.

"No," replied Sydney, rather dryly, "I'd rather you didn't. It doesn't seem quite fitting to offer to take you down the lake and then make you paddle. Besides, I believe I'm beginning to get into the thing."

The girl seemed somewhat dubious, but she suggested that he should head in for the shore, where there was less wind under the wall of dark pines that crept close down to the water's edge, and soon they were sliding more smoothly forward, suspended, so it seemed, midway between the dusky needles and mighty branches and their inverted image in the crystal depths below. Ahead there was no sign of the glassy surface, save when some floating twig that rested on it slid back to them, and it was only abreast of the canoe that it was made visible by the slight ripple flung off by the bow. By and by Sydney let his paddle trail in the water to ease his blistering palm.

"I don't know how this strikes you—perhaps you're used to it—but it seems really wonderful to me," he observed. "Look at the reflection of those boulders. One would almost feel tempted to jump out on them. You positively can't distinguish between the real thing and the shadow."

"After all, that's not such a very unusual difficulty, is it?" inquired his companion, with a smile.

Sydney made a little whimsical gesture of expostulation.

"That," he declared, "is the kind of thing it's wiser not to trouble one's self over. Once upon a time I had to read up what some of those German fellows have to

say on such subjects, and I don't mind admitting that I found them very trying."

The girl could imagine it, and a twinkle crept into her eyes; but Sydney, who did not notice this, went on.

"It seems to me that it's wiser to stick to the nice comfortable things you understand—the ones there's no nonsense about."

The girl laughed, and it seemed to him that her laugh was very musical.

"Yes," she agreed, "that's the sensible English view, and I may admit the usual Canadian one too. You are English, aren't you?"

"Of course. I suppose I look it."

There was no doubt that he did. His companion had seen men of different kinds in her time—Canadians and Americans of the Pacific Slope, Frenchmen, Mexicans, Germans and Scandinavians—and she had decided that, although this was not always in his favor, the insular Englishman possessed the most salient characteristics.

"Well," she said, with candor that contained a trace of malice, "it was not so much your appearance as your manner which suggested it. As a people you're not impulsive; though, of course, a certain amount of caution is desirable."

"Caution?" queried Sydney, gazing at her with a sense of uneasiness, and not noticing that the canoe had come to a standstill.

"Yes," she responded with a smile, "you, for instance, would pause to reflect before you did anything that seemed a little out of the usual course, wouldn't you?"

The man felt the blood rise to his face as he remembered his hesitation when she had spoken to him on the hotel veranda, although at the time he had not imagined that she could have noticed it. However, he looked at her steadily and laughed.

"The trouble," he admitted, "is that when I reflect too much it not infrequently results in my doing something particularly foolish. In fact, in my case it's a dangerous habit. I won't indulge in it again."

Then he dipped the paddle vigorously, and once more the canoe turned almost around.

"We haven't made a great deal of progress," he added. "How far did you say the ranch is that you are going to?"

"Six miles to the place where I can get a horse. You have been half an hour covering one."

"Then," said Sydney, decidedly, "we must be getting on."

He did better during the next hour, for he was now acquiring the trick of the paddle, but in the meanwhile the spruce twigs seemed to be working into his knees, and one hand was growing badly blistered. He almost wished that he had never seen the canoe, and it seemed to him that if he had exercised his English caution to more purpose an hour earlier it would have saved him a good deal of painful labor. He did not, however, greatly regret the fact that he had not done so, for it was, after all, very pleasant in some respects to glide across that gleaming lake and listen while his companion gave him odd scraps of information about the country, as she presently did. Besides, there was in him a spice of the saving contempt for bodily weariness and physical pain which is to be found in many an amateur athlete such as he had been, as well as in most of the small ranchers and axmen who are stubbornly driving their roads and clearings farther into the wilderness through which he was traveling.

He did not wince when the spruce twigs cruelly galled his knees and a little blood from his raw palm dyed the paddle haft; but the girl noticed his disregard of these things and was pleased with it. There was, she recognized, a commendable resoluteness in him.

"Won't you let me help you for a while?" she asked.

"No, thanks," replied Sydney, "I suppose I shall have to learn the thing some time if I stay in this country."

"Then you are thinking of staying?"

The question rather startled Sydney. At the moment of speaking he had in a half-conscious fashion certainly thought of staying, but he remembered suddenly that if he married Miss Carteret he would doubtless be expected to take her to England and give her the entry to the world to which he was accustomed. That he would be able to do so was, he fancied, one of the points that might count in his favor, for, while his social position was, after all, not a very prominent one, he was received everywhere in the country, and in a good many houses in London. On the other hand, he had quite decided that he had not come there to marry Miss Carteret, and somehow his companion's presence made that more apparent. Then, too, he was becoming more and more conscious that the country was getting hold of him. It was, he felt, by no means impossible that he would stay there altogether.

"I really don't know," he replied. "I certainly didn't think of it when I came here. In fact"—and he hesitated—"it was to a great extent the idea of getting a little climbing and fishing that brought me."

His companion noticed that he did not seem to know just what he had come for, which naturally struck her as a little curious.

"Then you expect to decide by and by?"

"Yes," answered Sydney, with a trace of dryness. "It's quite possible that I shall be able to make up my mind in the next day or two."

The girl asked no further questions, but when they crept round a point and came out into the breeze again she appeared determined to assist him.

"If you will give me the second paddle I could, at least, keep her head straight," she persisted.

"I'd rather you didn't," said Sydney, whose hand was now bleeding freely. "For one thing, you'll certainly get your sleeve very wet."

"I'm afraid neither of those reasons counts for much against the fact that I'd rather I did."

Sydney looked at her and laughed.

"Now we seem to have arrived at what one might call an *impasse.* It's rather a pity, since there is, I think, only one way out of it."

"There can't be a way out of an *impasse.*"

"No," returned Sydney, dryly, "unless one turns back."

"Of course," his companion assented. "That is what I wished you to realize. You see, I have always been accustomed to doing what I like."

"Then I'm afraid you must have been a little spoiled."

There was a trace of vexation in the girl's expression.

"That's outside the question, isn't it? The difficulty is that we are still two or three miles from the landing, and I have some distance to go after we reach it. I should a good deal rather get my sleeve wet than ride a strange Cayuse over a dangerous trail in the dark."

"I'm sorry," confessed Sydney. "I never thought of that. Perhaps you'd better paddle. We really don't seem to be making much progress."

He handed her the spare paddle and watched her as, turning from him, she swung it with a rhythmic grace. There was no doubt that she could paddle, and the canoe surged forward at every stroke, until presently a little opening in the pines, with one or two wooden houses in it, came flitting back to them. By and by he ran the canoe in upon the shingle, and,

springing out before he could help her, she stopped a moment to smile at him.

"Thank you," she said, and turning away toward the houses left him sitting in the canoe wondering who she could be and where she came from. Although his hands were raw and bleeding, it would have afforded him pleasure to have gone on with her several miles farther.

Then he took out his pipe, and was lying on the shingle smoking when Brodie arrived. The latter grinned as he noticed his hands.

"I can leave my canoe here and paddle you down the rest of the way, if you like," he offered.

"Then by all means do it," requested Sydney decidedly. "I've had enough paddling to last me a month."

They set out a few minutes later, and a couple of hours had slipped by when Sydney sat on the veranda of a little wooden hotel looking out upon the lake. The water now flung back a wan gleam beyond the shadow of the black pines, and their tall spires cut sharp against a fading green transparency. There was just light enough to read by, and Sydney started as he opened the first of the letters the Indian had brought him. Then his face grew suddenly tense and set, for it became evident that a disaster had befallen him. The letter was from an old friend of his in England.

"I want this to reach you as soon as you hear of the dreadful thing, or before if possible," it ran. "The others will give you the details, more than enough, I fear, and—bear with me for saying it—they're horribly suggestive on the face of them, and for this reason you must drive the idea they convey out of your mind. That dear old Jim—for he is still that to me—has been very reckless is quite clear now, but while one or two of his colleagues have bolted I am absolutely sure that he meant to face the situation. You must understand that I was with him at the station. He

had, I think, a faint expectation of raising funds in London that would tide him over the crisis, and he was going there to keep an appointment with some financier. We were a little late, with the line to cross, and the train was coming in. They would, perhaps, have waited, but Jim made a dash for it. His foot slipped —I shall swear to that fact shortly—and the end came suddenly. I can't bring myself to dwell on it, but it will always be a relief to me that Poulson called on me before his report of it came out in the *Chronicle*."

Sydney let the letter drop. He had not read it all, for he felt that he could not face his friend's expressions of sympathy just yet. Two facts, at least, were plain. His brother had been killed in a manner that suggested suicide, and Carteret's bank had failed. This meant that the family name had been dragged in the mire, and that he was a pauper. The disaster was unbearable in its suddenness, and he clenched his galled hands tight as the full horror of it became more and more clear to him. He had been fond of Jim, and it would have been a relief to start back at once and face the disgrace with him; but Jim was dead, and everybody, it seemed, believed that he had taken that way of escape.

Then with an effort he opened the other letters. There were three of them, and while they said significantly little about Jim they made it plain that the failure of the bank had ruined most of the shopkeepers in the little country town, had brought struggling people down to poverty, and had hit very hard many of the leading families in the vicinity. It was clear that the name of Carteret had become obnoxious in the county, and one letter contained a suggestive sentence. "In fact," it ran, "if you can find anything to do in Canada it would be much better if you did not come back."

Sydney set his lips as he read this, although he admitted the truth of it. He had no friends or relatives

who in any way needed him, and he fancied that the few who had written only desired to be rid of all connection between themselves and the family that had brought disgrace on them.

After a while he carefully folded up the letters, and, descending the steps, walked down to the shore of the lake, where he strode up and down, floundering among the driftwood and over the boulders in the growing darkness. Exertion of any kind was a relief just then.

CHAPTER IV

AN EVENTFUL DECISION

THE following afternoon found Sydney still at the little hotel. He had lain awake all night dazed by the shock that the news of his brother's death had caused him, and in the morning he had risen weighed down by black dejection to consider the question as to what he should do. One thing alone was certain. He could not go back to England. He had no profession, and, now that the bank had failed, the money which had provided him with an income had gone with the rest. He had had no share in the management of the business, which was a slight consolation, but the letters had made it clear that it had been a disastrous failure.

It was particularly distressing to have to think of ways and means in the midst of his numbing grief, but there was no doubt that it must be done, and in a half-dazed fashion he tried to grapple with the situation. He remembered that, although his share in his father's estate, which had consisted largely of stock in the bank, would now fall into the hands of the creditors, a few general securities had been bequeathed him by his mother's will. These were sound enough, with the exception of one lot of stock which, when he had endeavored to dispose of it shortly before he left for Canada, proved to be practically unsalable, as Jim had warned him. He had, however, sold out the other shares, and transferred about three hundred pounds to

his credit at a Canadian bank. He had expected to spend a good deal of it on his trip, and Jim, who—he remembered this clearly now—had urged him to take more, said that if there should be anything left over he could speculate in a building lot outside of some rising city. That three hundred pounds was safe, and, as Carteret's was a limited concern, and the money had in any case come from his mother's family, he did not think the creditors had the slightest claim on it. The rest had, as it happened, remained in his brother's hands, and he did not expect to recover any of it.

That was one point decided, but a grim smile crept into his heavy eyes as he remembered that the money he had intended to spend on a couple of months' excursion was all that he could now rely on for the rest of his life. It was not a pleasant situation for a young man of no profession, no knowledge of business, and—he admitted this candidly—no particular capabilities of any kind. However, he faced it resolutely. He had, at least, a vigorous body, sound health, and powerful muscles, and it seemed to him possible that they would be of some service in a new country. Fortunately, he had never cherished any illusions about himself. He quite recognized that if hitherto he had been exempt from the toil and care which fell to the lot of other men it was due largely to the accidental possession of money with which his father's efforts had provided him. Now that the money had vanished he was willing, since he could not lead, to serve in the ranks. There were things he would not do, but it was characteristic of him that he had no great objection to toiling with his hands.

In the meanwhile he had merely told Brodie, who seemed somewhat puzzled by the change in him, that he did not know when he was going on; and in the afternoon he was sitting on the veranda when a man who had just ridden in from the railroad arrived at the

hotel. He came out on the veranda, and stood close behind Sydney, talking to the hotel-keeper.

"I was at Morland a day or two, and left by the Pacific express last night," he said. "There'd been a mighty big landslide on the range."

"Oh, yes," returned the hotel-keeper. "One of these strangers was telling me about the thing. They were in the track of it."

"Then they were fortunate in getting clear," said the first speaker. "It seems most certain there was a man killed."

Sydney turned round sharply.

"A man killed! Tell me what you know about it."

The stranger, who appeared quite willing, sat down opposite him and took out a cigar.

"I guess I got it reasonably straight," he began. "Just before I left Morland a rancher rode in, and he was telling the boys in the store. It appears that he heard the slide, and soon afterward a Siwash came along to his place badly scared. He said he and an Englishman were on the range when the slide came down on them, and he started running, with the Englishman most a hundred yards behind him. He got up the range somehow, but when the slide had gone by there wasn't a sign of the Englishman."

Sydney looked at Brodie, who appeared about to speak. Unobserved by the others Sydney made him a sign to be silent, for a half-formed thought had flashed into his mind. In another moment the narrator, who had paused to light his cigar, went on again.

"The rancher went back up the range with the Siwash to where he had last seen the Englishman. The slope—it wasn't so steep just there—had held up some of the slide, and he said there was at least a thousand tons of dirt and stones and smashed trees lying about. That was all—except for a little cartridge wallet lying just on the side of it there wasn't a sign of the man."

Brodie looked at Sydney inquiringly, but the latter turned to the narrator.

"They decided that he must have been killed?" he asked.

"It seemed a sure thing. The Siwash said they were going to Morland, and he would have got there easy in the afternoon. He hadn't turned up when I left. If he'd got away hurt he'd have headed for the ranch. It appears they could see the clearing from that part of the range. The rancher said it was quite certain he was lying there with all that pile of dirt and stones and trees on top of him. He figured that one might dig for a year without finding him."

"Was there anything in the satchel to identify him?" Sydney asked with what struck Brodie as a curious eagerness.

"Yes," was the answer; "it seems there was a little shooting book with 'S. J. Carteret' on the back of it. Inside he'd written an address—the ranch that Carteret of Vancouver uses as a summer-house, not far from here. That seems to fix the man as a relation of his. Guess somebody ought to go over there and tell him."

He broke off abruptly.

"Excuse me," he added. "There's a man yonder I want a talk with."

Striding to the head of the stairway, he called out, "Hold on, Pete."

A man below answered him, and when they went away together, and the hotel-keeper strolled back into the house, Sydney turned to Brodie, who was evidently waiting for him to speak.

"You said there was a ranch around here that could be bought for about a thousand dollars. Where is it?"

"Close down by Carteret's place," replied Brodie, who made it evident that this was not the question he had expected.

"It would be possible to make a living—some kind of a living out of it?"

"Well," drawled Brodie, reflectively, "I guess I could; it's a mighty good ranch for the money. Of course you wouldn't get a place with much of a clearing round it under four thousand. The man who has this place got himself badly hurt in a sawmill, and seems to figure he'll be no use at chopping. That's why he can't hold on to it, and wants to try storekeeping. Anyway, you'd have to take odd jobs, as that man did, but there's a good deal of trail-chopping going on."

Sydney thought earnestly for the next minute or two, while Brodie sat watching him with evident curiosity. He was still a little dazed by the shock, but it was clear to him that he could neither present himself at Carteret's ranch nor establish himself in the vicinity as a relative. His name had been dragged in the mire, and it seemed better to drop it altogether; and an opportunity for doing so had now been offered him. He had only to say nothing and permit an account of the accident to appear in the provincial papers, as it doubtless would, and Carteret, who would certainly see it, would send word of his death to England. There was nobody who would greatly grieve over it, and he fancied it would be almost a relief to his few relatives, who evidently resented the discredit the failure of Carteret's bank had brought upon them.

"Brodie," he said, "I'll buy that ranch. You told me a day or two ago that you would do anything you could to get even with me."

"I guess I meant it," replied his companion, simply.

"Then, as these people will evidently take it for granted that I was killed on the range, I want you to let them do so. I can't tell you why, only I'm in trouble—big trouble—and it would make the thing a little easier for me."

Brodie pursed up his bronzed face.

"Well," he declared, "in one way I don't like it; but I guess it can't do Hilton any harm. He's dead. If it's going to make the thing any easier, you can count right on me."

He paused and then made a little gesture.

"We'll let it go at that; but there's something I should have said. Whoever runs that ranch has first option of doing anything that's wanted on the Carteret place. Carteret generally brings a few city people down with him for the fishing, and he hired the other man to take them out in the canoes, split stovewood and generally keep things straight. He'll sure send for you."

Sydney was not pleased to hear this. He would greatly have preferred to avoid his Canadian kinsfolk, but Brodie had assured him that the ranch was a bargain, and he had confidence in the man, besides which he did not think he would be able to find another within the limit of his scanty means.

"It's a very long time since Carteret saw me, and I fancy I've changed since then," he said. "I'll start for the railroad and go down to Vancouver for some money at once. We'll look at the ranch as soon as I come back."

Brodie still seemed dubious, but he made a sign of assent.

"Well," he drawled, "I've got to see you through with it, but I guess you'd better fix up what you're going to call yourself right now."

"Jardine," announced Sydney. "After all, I've some right to do it. It's part of my name."

Half an hour later he was riding toward the railroad over a particularly bad trail, but he did not spare the horse. The rapid motion afforded him some relief from his thoughts, and the hotel-keeper had told him that unless he traveled fast the train would have left

the little town before he reached it. This, Sydney recognized, might have an unfortunate result, as it was desirable that he should obtain the money he had sent to Vancouver before any account of the accident appeared in the papers. It seemed very probable that the bank manager would make difficulties if payment should be demanded by a man who was reported to have just been killed. He admitted that the manager might consider the thing just as curious if he read of it afterward, but by then he would have disappeared into the bush with a different name; and it was conceivable that the bank people might not notice the report at all, which, indeed, proved to be the case.

The train was at the station when he reached it, and he scrambled into the last car and flung himself into a seat, breathless but a little easier in his mind. He had, at least, decided what to do, and he meant to abide by the decision.

While Sydney was in Vancouver, Leslie Carteret sat outside his ranch one evening waiting for the mail, with a relative of his Canadian wife who had, since the death of the latter, presided over his household. The title ranch was deceptive, for there were no cattle about the place, and the clearing was singularly small. The property had been bought by an Englishman of means, who had intended to make a ranch of it but had grown tired of the life before he had carried out his purpose. He had, however, built himself a very pretty and unusually commodious house, ridged on one side by a wide veranda with wooden pillars and arches of fretted scroll-work. There were green lattice shutters to the windows; the low roof was laid with red cedar shingles; and the picturesque building nestled in a little gap in the woods, with a great range, snow-tipped most of the year, towering behind it, and a wide blue lake stretching away in front. Indeed, the prospect from it was exceedingly beautiful; and now that his share in

business was confined to a seat on the directorate of one or two companies, Carteret spent a good deal of each summer there. He was a man who had toiled strenuously in his younger days, and with whom things had gone well, but success had not spoiled him.

In person he was tall and spare, with clear gray eyes set about with many wrinkles, and close gray hair; an old man who had married late and lost his wife soon afterward. He was Colonial in all his sympathies, but in spite of this he retained a deep tenderness for the old country, which he had seen only once since he left it to seek a wider field in Canada.

His companion was a little, gentle widow of sixty, endued with a certain whimsical shrewdness, and she looked upon Carteret's fondness for England as more or less of a mania. Perhaps it was, for there was no reason why he should not have gone back there had he greatly desired it.

"I wonder whether the mail will bring us any word from Sydney," he said at length. "It's curious that he hasn't written since he left Montreal, which must have been a good while ago. He could have got here in a week if he had wanted to."

Mrs. Graham smiled.

"He's probably a little diffident," she suggested. "If so, it's a becoming trait, and one that a good many young men from the other side seem to lack. Perhaps you made the hint too plain when you invited him."

Carteret laughed good-humoredly.

"I haven't let fall a hint of any kind since I saw his father—and that was a very long while ago."

"Still, you have certainly had the idea in your mind. In a case of that kind one is apt to make one's feelings known without exactly intending it."

Carteret admitted the truth of this assertion, but his face grew a little grave.

"I liked the lad; and I owe his father everything

I have. He backed me in my first ventures, and stood by me with undiminished confidence once or twice when things went very wrong. He was a remarkably fine type of the English business gentleman. Besides, Clare will marry some day, and I'm getting an old man."

"Wouldn't you rather have her nearer you, in Canada?"

Jean Graham was quite aware that she had made this suggestion several times already, but the subject was a favorite one with Carteret, and they both repeated themselves when they discussed it. When one has harked back to the same topic every now and then for two or three years it is, as she had discovered, a little difficult to be original.

"For my sake, yes," he admitted. "Still, she might come back here afterward. If her husband has the right views it would be possible. Anyway, I want her to see the world, the great world—to us that means London—and to take her rightful place in it, for a while at least. With her cleverness and my money it wouldn't be difficult, and Sydney's wife would have the entry everywhere within reason. Of course, on the other hand, if the thing didn't suggest itself to the young folks there would be an end of it."

"Suggest itself? Are you under the delusion that Clare has no idea of your benevolent intentions?"

"If she has, it will simplify things. At least, I have never directly forced the matter on her attention. After all, it's quite unnecessary to tell you that."

His companion laughed.

"If you really believe that it would simplify things, so much the better. I'm afraid, however, that I can't agree with you."

"Well," said Carteret, "we shall no doubt have an opportunity for ascertaining very shortly. Here's the mail-carrier."

A mounted man rode up to the building, and Carteret laid the two or three letters and newspapers on a chair. There was one black-edged envelope, and he opened that first, laid it down, and tore off the cover of an English newspaper. As he read it the hot flush which had crept into his face faded, leaving it gray and set.

"I suppose a clerk posted the thing as usual," he said, and Jean Graham fancied that he meant the paper. "If they had remembered about it, some of them would no doubt have tried to keep part of this from me."

He flung the paper on the chair and spread out his hands.

"Jim Carteret's dead—died in disgrace. The bank has gone under. Chief accountant can't be found—auditors arrested. The concern must have been tottering for several years—thousands ruined."

He paused a moment.

"There's only one thing to be thankful for—the man who built up that bank died before his son made his name odious to every honest man."

Then he seemed to calm himself with an effort.

"Sydney may be here any day. There's a certain probability of his not having heard of it."

His companion looked at him curiously, for she had opened the *Colonist* in the meanwhile.

"It's a very striking coincidence—I dare not say that it's providential, for if his brother managed the bank, as I understand he did, it couldn't have been his fault," she said, handing him the paper. "Sydney has probably been spared a painful shock."

Carteret took the paper, saw the heading, "Accident in the Ranges," read a few lines, and dropped it on the floor.

"Both of them—the same way! The thing's horrible," he said hoarsely.

He sat very still and silent for a minute or two, and Jean Graham, who picked up the English paper, guessed what was in his mind.

"Are you sure you have any right to think that?" she asked at length.

"Yes," answered Carteret, "I'm afraid I have. At the inquest they tried to save Jim's credit on the only point on which it could be saved, but that the accident should happen the very day before the climax is too much of a coincidence."

"But it was very different in Sydney's case."

"Was it? These people in England would have written to him before they wrote to me. It's very probable that he got the letters; and if he did it would provide a convincing explanation of the affair recorded in the *Colonist*. Can you imagine the feelings of a clean-minded, honest lad suddenly called upon to face ruin, the shock of his brother's death, and black disgrace? Besides, though he might never have done it deliberately, on the spur of the moment it would be so easy! He was behind the Siwash—he had only to run a little slower." Carteret paused a moment, and the signs of tension were very plain in his face. "It's hard enough for me to bear, a connection only, nearly six thousand miles away in Canada; what must it have been to his brother? Can one be astonished that he hadn't strength enough to face it?"

He pointed to the English paper, still in her hands.

"Read it carefully, Jean, and then tell Clare what you like about the facts. Only, she is not to guess all that we suspect."

A few minutes later a girl came up the path from the lake. She was a tall girl with gray eyes and hair that had burnished copper gleams in it, and she wore a white hat. Carteret rose when he saw her.

"Jean has something to tell you, Clare," he said, and turning away suddenly went into the house.

The girl came up on the veranda, and Mrs. Graham accomplished her unpleasant task and withdrew soon afterward, leaving Clare Carteret sitting very still, with compassion shining in her eyes, which had just then liquid gleams in them. She was affected by the horrible story, though, as she had never seen either Jim or Sydney Carteret, the pity she felt was to some extent impersonal. Still, there was no doubt that she thought of Sydney with a certain regret.

It was, of course, only natural that she had for some time been quite aware of her father's views in regard to him, though they had never been very definitely explained to her; and though this was, perhaps, curious, she had not gone quite so far as to resent them. For one thing, she had felt quite sure that no attempt would be made to force her into a marriage with the man unless she liked him, and that helped to remove any prejudice she might have felt against him. She had decided that she could, at least, wait and form an impartial opinion when she saw him, and there were one or two points in his favor. Although well known in commercial circles, her father had never made any attempt to play a leading part in provincial social life, and as the result of this Clare, who had been educated in Paris and afterward studied music for a year in Germany, had lived more or less quietly. Now and then she had attended some semi-official function in Victoria, and occasionally she had met the officers of the Pacific Squadron at festivities given in their honor; but it was only on such occasions as these that she had been brought into contact with what she regarded as the outer world.

The girl that Sydney Carteret married would, however, as her father not infrequently had hinted, be expected to make her social mark in England, and by degrees she had come to regard him with a touch of romantic imagination as one who could, provided, of

course, that he fulfilled her expectations in other respects, open to her the gates of a fuller and wider life than that she had led in Vancouver and in the scented shadow of the bush. She was young, clever and well-favored physically, and it was not astonishing that now and then she had longed for the opportunities that he could offer her. This had given him a certain importance in her eyes, and she had thought a good deal about him at times; and now, when it seemed that he had died overwhelmed with disaster, she was stirred by compassion for him.

In the meanwhile it was growing dark in the little clearing, and a wonderful fragrance stole out into the dew-chilled air from the somber ranks of firs and cedars. Then a crescent moon sailed up from behind their towering spires and cast its silver reflection on the rippling lake.

Rising quietly Clare went back into the lighted hall.

CHAPTER V

THE HIRED MAN

IT was a fortnight later, and about the middle of the morning, when Sydney, attired in a blue shirt, blue duck trousers, and long boots, was busy sawing stove-wood at the back of Carteret's ranch. He had bought the shirt because Brodie told him that it was what the small ranchers usually wore. The storekeeper, however, kept only one kind, and it had a brilliant scarlet lacing up the breast of it, which endued Sydney with a picturesqueness he by no means desired. Carteret had walked over to his ranch a few days earlier and hired him to do what he called chores; and it had been a relief to Sydney, who had dreaded the interview, to see that his employer had shown no sign of recognizing him.

He had felt a certain embarrassment when he promised to undertake the duties, but it was evident that he must raise a few dollars by some means; and as Carteret had informed him that if he should be unwilling to do what was required he must bring in a man from one of the settlements, Sydney could think of no very convincing reason why he should not do the work. He had been sawing a couple of hours when he stopped to straighten his back, which already ached unpleasantly, and then he sat down on a big pile of logs. There was a trace of grimness in his smile as he did it, for he admitted that he had first cast a swift glance round

to see whether anybody was about. To a young man who had, within limits, done precisely what he liked, it was a distinctly new experience to realize that while the sun was in the sky every minute of his time belonged to somebody else.

It was also disconcerting to feel that he tired so easily. He had pulled a good oar at Oxford, had played forward at football, and had plodded through the turnips and over stubble after partridges for hours together; but he was discovering now that one has slowly and painfully to acquire proficiency in even the crudest and most primitive forms of labor. There was no doubt that his back ached and that his shoulders and hands were sore. Stretching himself wearily he took out his pipe. Then recalling suddenly that he was supposed to be cutting stovewood, he laid it down, and stood up again with a faint flush in his face as he cast another glance about him.

It was a still morning. Not far away the lake gleamed, a wide sheet of twinkling brightness, between the trees that rose about him, majestically straight, lifting high their somber spires in tremendous serried ranks. A sun that was considerably hotter than he liked blazed down into the opening, which was dotted with six-foot, sawed-off stumps, garlanded with fern, and, spread about among these, a garden indifferently cared for. Close in front of him stood the saw-frame, and between its upper arms rested a small red cedar, from which he had painfully been cutting big lumps. As a matter of fact, he had cut them larger than was advisable, with the idea of saving labor, for the big cross-cut saw stuck in the gummy wood and at times he could scarcely drag it loose. After another attempt he decided that he had done enough sawing for a while and that he would proceed to split up some of the cylindrical sections.

He set one up on a block, and taking up a big, long-

hafted ax, whirled it above his head. It came down crashing, but the haft had turned a little in his blistered hands, and the heavy blade striking almost flat sent a horrible jar up his arms. Thereupon it must be admitted that he lost his temper, and with a mild expletive he threw the tool at the pile of logs. Chopping, it seemed, was more difficult than sawing, and he had yet to learn that, as practised in Canada, it is almost an art. Then with a little half-ashamed laugh he picked up the ax, and after several unsuccessful attempts contrived to split one of the sections. He next set up a bigger one, and striking it fair drove the blade in deep, but the wood did not split, and though he tugged savagely it cost him several minutes to get the ax out again. When he had done this he was very hot and angry, and he relieved his feelings by bestowing a few vigorous epithets upon the tool. This was certainly not logical, but he felt better after it.

Then he turned with a start, as a girl who appeared among the trees came toward him. She wore a white hat, and though she was not dressed in the curious skirt now he had no difficulty in recognizing her as his companion on the trip down the lake. She seemed a little astonished to see him, and Sydney wondered uncomfortably whether she had heard what he had said a moment or two ago, and whether he should make a grab at his jacket, which lay close by. It occurred to him, however, that he could not get into it gracefully, and that to put it on would be to suggest that she meant to stop and speak to him, which it was more than possible that she would not do. She did stop; and she looked at him with a smile.

"Then it's—you—who have taken Jackson's ranch?"

"Yes," replied Sydney, deprecatingly. "After all, I suppose there's no reason why I shouldn't?"

"No," answered the girl, with another smile, "I don't think there is."

Sydney felt more sure of his ground now. He remembered that Canada is in some respects a democratic country, and it seemed that the girl did not mean to insist upon the difference between their stations. The truth had, however, not dawned on him yet.

"You are staying at Carteret's ranch?" he asked.

"Staying doesn't quite express it. I live here."

Sydney gasped.

"Clare Carteret!"

The girl seemed a little puzzled by his evident astonishment, but she laughed.

"My name is certainly Clare Carteret," she acknowledged.

Sydney held up the ax and attentively regarded a big notch which he had somehow made in the blade.

"You evidently got home safe the other day," he ventured.

"Oh, yes," was the answer. "That night, however, I was going only as far as a ranch where I had been staying a day or two." Then she glanced at the wood. "Do you find this any easier than paddling?"

"No," Sydney confessed ruefully, "I can't say that I do. These blocks certainly look big enough, but they're considerably more difficult to hit in the middle than one would expect, and the ax has an exasperating trick of sticking fast when you do manage to strike the right place. I suppose that as I've been at it since breakfast I should have split up most of that tree by now?"

He saw the twinkle in his companion's eyes.

"Well," she laughed, "since you have asked the question, one of the bush ranchers would have split up half the pile. Let me see how you do it."

Sydney would greatly have preferred that she had asked him anything else; but there was no help for it, and he swung the ax.

"I think," he said, "I can more easily show you how I don't."

The heavy blade came down and wedged itself fast, and he grew hot as he tugged at it, for there was no doubt that Miss Carteret was laughing.

"No," she explained when he had drawn it out, "that was wrong. You see those marks running out from the center—the medullary rays? The wood will cleave easily if you can hit the log in line with them, outside the middle."

Sydney tried again, and this time a neat, triangular section split out readily, but when, dropping the ax blade, he surveyed it complacently his companion moved away. She turned, however, and looked back at him with a smile.

"If that is your pipe you will probably smash it as you move about," she said.

Sydney stooped and picked it up, but not before she had noticed that it was heavily banded with silver, and that the mouthpiece was of beautiful clear amber, which had a certain significance to her. She had unusually sharp eyes, and she saw that there were letters engraved on one band. The last of them appeared to be C, which struck her as somewhat curious as she had been told that the man's name was Jardine. She decided to examine the pipe more carefully if he left it lying about again.

"Thank you," said Sydney; and the girl, without replying, went down the pathway to the lake.

It was only by an effort that Sydney resisted the desire to sit down again and endeavor to analyze the impression she had made on him, although he admitted that this certainly was not what Carteret was paying him to do. Still, as he swung the ax he recalled her lithe grace of movement and her fine carriage, as well as her nicely-modulated voice, and above all her smile. She had evidently been a little amused, but he felt that he could not reasonably blame her. Finally, he decided that Clare Carteret was by no means the kind of girl

one could expect to be willing to marry the first young Englishman who presented himself, as Jim had several times suggested.

In the meanwhile Clare joined a companion, who was sitting among the boulders by the lake. Lucy Brattan, who came from Vancouver, was rather forcibly pretty, and as a rule uncompromisingly outspoken.

"I was beginning to wonder what was keeping you," she said. "Talking to the new hired man, I suppose. He's considerably smarter than most of them, though that shirt of his is startling. It's too much like those things the Swiss milkmaids in the pictures wear."

"Then you have seen him?"

"Of course! I walked past the place where he was chopping for that express purpose, but I didn't stop and speak, as you seem to have done. Since he's English, it's quite possible that he would have misunderstood it, or, at least, decided that I was a very forward young person. I sailed by, with my head up, in my grandest manner, though it must be admitted that the effort was wasted, because he scarcely glanced at me. There's evidently something very wrong with that young man."

Clare laughed.

"How many Englishmen have you seen altogether?"

"About three dozen. That is, Fleet officers, Crown Office men, and the kind that come here for shooting and fishing. When you've seen one you've seen them all. Of course, I'm not counting business and mining men. They come into quite a different category."

"Then where would you place my father?"

"Away up on top of all. He's flesh and blood—and brains—and he belongs to us." Miss Brattan paused and looked at her companion with a suggestive smile. "There's a good deal of flesh and blood about you too, though I'm not sure that you recognize it."

Clare made no immediate answer to this. Though

Lucy not infrequently talked a good deal of nonsense, she now and then made a statement that was startlingly accurate, and Clare felt that she had done so in this case. She had been vaguely conscious for some time that the larger part of her nature was, as she thought of it, lying dormant, waiting for something that was to stir it to life and activity, and this was partly why she had looked forward to the arrival of Sydney Carteret with a certain expectant curiosity.

"After all," she said at length, "if you are right in your last remark—I mean in assuming my ignorance—I am, perhaps, to be envied."

Her companion idly flung a pebble into the water.

"Well," she replied, "I don't know, though there is possibly something to be said for that point of view. Anyway, I'd keep your nice reposefulness while you can. It's soothing to have you about one. In the meanwhile, are you going to keep that poor young man sawing wood all day?"

"If we don't you'll probably get no dinner tomorrow. Cooking takes a good deal of wood, and he didn't seem to be making much progress when I left him."

"Well, if you don't make him take us out in the boat this afternoon, I certainly shall. That, as the boys say, is a sure thing."

It accordingly happened that when Sydney walked back to the ranch after the very untempting lunch he had contrived to prepare for himself, Carteret told him that the girls wished to go out on the lake, and it was with relief that he laid down the cross-cut he had just taken up. He was by no means sure of his paddling, but anything seemed preferable to sawing through that resinous wood under the hot afternoon sun.

He followed Miss Carteret and her companion down to the lake, walking some distance behind them, but

He had not in the least expected it, and he was off his guard. Half instinctively he glanced at Clare Carteret, and a flush of darker color crept into his clear skin. Then he glanced at Miss Brattan, and though she was very demure he felt that she meant to have an answer.

"I think I really came out for a little fishing and climbing," he replied, recognizing that his hesitation had escaped neither of his companions.

"And you were so pleased with the Mountain Province that you decided to stay in it?"

"The country certainly gets hold of one."

"Have you really seen anything of it yet?"

"I don't mind admitting that I'm satisfied with the little I have seen."

Miss Brattan shook her head.

"I'm afraid it has been a deceptive glimpse, and I should like to tell you that you have commenced your duties under unusually favorable auspices," she said. "You see, if I had gone over to your side and you had taken me around the West End of London or into the cathedral precincts of one of your old-world towns, it wouldn't have given me any comprehensive idea of English life." She paused and added innocently, "You could have done that, couldn't you?"

Sydney winced at the abrupt question. He wondered whether this most variable young woman had really asked it casually, or whether it had been done with the deliberate intention of disconcerting him. He had a suspicion, which was, as it happened, perfectly warranted, that she was amusing herself at his expense.

"I don't quite see the drift of that," he objected.

"Then I'm afraid you must be a little stupid," smiled Miss Brattan. "In a general way, if you had found it necessary to earn a few dollars here you

would have had to work up to your waist in water, building dams or flumes for one of the mines, or would have had to saw up trees from sunrise until dark, or strain every muscle of your body trying to keep pace with some big machine in a sawmill. That is the real Canada. Instead of it you have only to row two idle young women up and down a lovely lake in the sunshine." She paused, and added reflectively, "I wonder whether you realize that you are a privileged person? There are very few hired men in the Province who wouldn't consider themselves very fortunate if that were all they were asked to do."

"I shouldn't blame them," said Sydney, meeting her gaze with a twinkle in his eyes. "There's no doubt that this is a good deal more satisfactory than the tasks you have described."

Then Clare broke in.

"I think we would better turn back now," she suggested. "Supper will be ready soon after we get home."

Sydney, who was becoming afraid of Miss Brattan's questions, dipped the oars, and the canoe slid smoothly down the lake through the broad belt of shadow which was creeping out across the gleaming water. He remained behind at the landing and the two girls walked back to the house alone. When they sat down on the veranda Lucy Brattan looked at Clare with a smile.

"I've had a pleasant afternoon," she announced. "We'll make him take us out quite often before those city people come down."

Clare laughed.

"I wonder whether Jardine enjoyed it as much as you did. I suppose you haven't satisfied your curiosity yet?"

"Not by a long way, but one or two things are evident. That young man doesn't seem quite sure of

his own name—which is just a little remarkable—and he doesn't seem to know what he came out for."

"He said it was for the fishing and mountain climbing."

"And as the country got hold of him he decided to take up ranching! It sounds all right until you consider it, and then it isn't convincing. Now, if a young man with the means to come out here just to spend a month or two in the way he suggested wanted to go in for ranching he wouldn't buy a little half-cleared place and then hire himself out to the nearest neighbor, though he admitted that he was quite satisfied with rowing you about the lake."

Clare turned to her rather sharply.

"Why me? I was not the only person in the canoe."

"You were the only one that he saw," laughed Lucy. "Except that he was rather angry with me once or twice I didn't count. Of course," she added confidentially, "I don't blame him. I think I drew blood when I talked to him about his jacket."

"Why did you do it?"

Lucy appeared to reflect.

"As a matter of fact, I'm not quite sure. Anyway, I wanted to see how thick he was in the skin, and, for another thing, I thought I'd let one of the folks from England try how they liked it. That was my best rendering of the English manner. You see, I've experienced it. Once, when I was guileless and felt cousinly, I used to try to talk to the tourists I came across on the steamboats and on the trains. That was how they looked and spoke to me. Now, unless I'm duly presented with full credentials, I get as far away from them as it's possible to do."

Clare smiled.

"After all, you haven't carried your investigations about Jardine very far."

"I haven't," Lucy admitted. "If I stay here, as I expect to, it's quite likely that I shall carry them a good deal farther."

Then Jean Graham appeared in the doorway calling them, and they went in to supper.

CHAPTER VI

A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE

THE next week passed uneventfully at the ranch, except that several guests arrived. They were, Sydney understood, some of Clare Carteret's Vancouver friends—pleasant young men and women, in whose manner toward him there was nothing to which he could take exception. Carteret had informed him that he was to hold himself at his guests' disposal, to take them out in the canoes if they desired to go fishing or attend them with the landing-net if they chose the river. In addition to this he had to split wood for the stove, and in one way or another he was a good deal about the house and frequently took his meals with its occupants—by no means an exceptional thing in the hired man's case in a good part of Canada.

Then one afternoon, Clare directed him to take the canoe up the lake and pole it as far as possible up a small river which flowed through a cañon, and to wait there until she and one or two of the others joined him. He was also to take a basket, as they were going to have supper in the woods. He did as he was bidden, and after an hour's row found the outlet of the river and propelled the canoe into it with a long fir pole. He had no great difficulty in doing this, for it was much the same as the punting to which he had been accustomed in England, although the stream was strong in places. He poled up against it for

perhaps a couple of miles, and then, running the craft in on a bank of shingle, he sat beside it smoking, somewhat impressed by his surroundings.

The river swirled through the bottom of a great rift between the rocks, so narrow and arched overhead that a pine which had fallen on the crest of it stretched right across the chasm. It was so far away that it looked scarcely thicker than a man's arm, but it stood out prominently, because it cut sharply against the narrow riband of blue sky. All below was wrapped in shadow, through which the tremendous walls of rock rose majestically, and the roar of water filled the place with deep-toned pulsations of sound. It seemed to Sydney that when the river was at its highest nobody could have entered the cañon, but it was low just then, and up the stream, at least, odd strips of shingle and great boulders divided rock from water. This was the way he expected Clare and her companions to come, but it was evident that they could not pass the point he had reached, because below it the river flowed between smooth walls of stone.

By and by he saw Clare and Lucy Brattan scrambling along over the boulders on the opposite side, followed by a young man, who, Sydney had heard, came from somewhere down Puget Sound. He could not go to meet them because there was a rapid in the way, and he waited until they drew almost abreast of him, when they climbed to a slightly projecting ridge of rock which offered a precarious foothold some feet above the water. He noticed that the ridge broke off into a slippery slope covered with moss and a foul red slime, with, perhaps, a foot of shingle at the bottom of it. Lucy Brattan, who came first, stopped abruptly when she reached this spot. She was, as usual, rather elaborately attired, and Sydney fancied that the artistically-fashioned skirt had cost a good many dollars.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "how are we to get down? It runs out too far to jump."

The man behind could not get past to assist her because the ridge was too narrow, and it seemed that he could not see the slope.

"Why don't you sit down and slide?" he suggested.

Lucy swung around with indignation in her eyes.

"Slide!" she ejaculated severely. "In a dress of this kind!"

Clare said nothing, but it was evident to Sydney that she did not like the prospect, and pushing the canoe across he ran it in upon the shingle at the foot of the slope of rock. He did not see how the girls could get down except as had been suggested, by a sitting glissade, and the foul, slimy surface did not look inviting for that.

"Can't you go back up the stream and get around some other way?" he asked.

"No," snapped Lucy, "it isn't to be thought of. Nothing would induce me to climb up that horrible gully."

"Then please stand still a minute," directed Sydney, thrusting the canoe a little farther up the stream.

Flinging the mooring line to the man, he stood up and leaned against the rock; but the craft, as he had partly expected, began to roll beneath him, and he straightened himself again, seeing that she was not stiff enough for what he had in mind. Then he quietly sprang over the side, and standing almost waist-deep in the river held up his hand to Clare, who was nearest him.

"I think I could help you into the canoe from here," he said.

Clare moved forward a little along the ledge, which was smeared with the red and slimy stain just there, and then stopped, looking down dubiously at the canoe. To reach it meant a drop of several feet, and Siwash

canoes are apt to roll over if one jumps into them. There was, however, another way, which Sydney did not suggest, though he felt that had he been called on to assist several of the young women he had met in a similar fashion he would not have hesitated. Instead, he lifted his jacket out of the canoe and laid it on the stone.

"If you place your toe here, and then just rest your knee on the jacket, I think you could get in."

Clare did it, and though she only murmured "Thank you," there was a certain appreciation in her eyes which sent a thrill through him as she took her place in the canoe. Then Lucy moved toward him and unhesitatingly held out her hands.

"You can lift—me—down," she said. "I won't break."

She dropped into his arms, and Sydney swung her into the canoe. Then, after the man had scrambled in, he let the craft slide down with the stream to the strip of shingle. When he reached it Lucy looked at him with a gleam in her eyes.

"That was very nice of you," she remarked.

Sydney smiled dryly.

"Was it? Would you be greatly astonished to hear that I nearly dropped you into the river?"

The man laughed outright, and Clare seemed amused, but Lucy turned and pointed to his stained jacket.

"You are taking a good deal too much for granted," she assured him. "I meant that it was very nice of you to spread out that thing for Clare to kneel on."

Sydney, accepting the correction, glanced at his clothes.

"I'm afraid that I'm rather wet to come into the canoe," he said. "If Mr. Haines would pull her down I could get dry and join you by the lake."

Haines said that he would have pleasure in doing it,

and it was only when the craft had slid down a frothing rush several hundred yards away that a thought struck him.

"I believe we have left Jardine on the wrong side," he said. "It's unfortunate, because I'm afraid I'm not equal to poling the canoe back up that rapid."

Lucy laughed.

"Then," she observed, "he'll probably have to swim. Has that just struck you?"

Clare looked at her, and a trace of vexation crept into her face.

"If it occurred to you earlier I certainly think you should have mentioned it," she said.

In the meanwhile Sydney, who already was very wet, contrived to get across, and set off through the bush for the lake. He reached the beach a mile from the spot where he supposed the canoe would be, and laying out his wet clothes on the hot stones, he went in for a swim. They were almost dry when he proceeded toward the mouth of the river an hour later, and after scrambling over the fringe of driftwood for some time he saw a blue wreath of smoke float out from among the trees. As he approached it he came upon Haines, who laid down the kettle he carried and, sitting down on a boulder, offered Sydney a cigar. He was a rather solemn young man, dressed with fastidious neatness, with a colorless face that suggested a city occupation, and carefully brushed dark hair, but Sydney felt inclined to like him.

"I'm sorry I left you behind, but we had gone some distance before I realized that you were on the wrong side, and I'm not accustomed to poling a canoe," he apologized. "Anyway, if it's a consolation to you, Miss Brattan has been guying me about it and other things until I was glad to get away. She has just given me instructions to fill this kettle at a creek, and on no account from the lake."

"I crossed one a little way back," said Sydney. "Miss Brattan seems addicted to indulging in pleasantries of the kind."

"Oh, yes," returned his companion, gravely. "A very amusing young woman. I sometimes feel it's a pity somebody doesn't provide her with a muzzle."

Sydney laughed, but he made no comment; and it was half an hour later when he went back with his companion carrying the kettle. Lucy was poking the fire with a branch, but she turned to them as they approached.

"You filled that kettle at a creek, Mr. Haines?"

Haines assured her that he had done so, and she looked at Sydney.

"It was very stupid of him to leave you there," she asserted. "How did you get dry?"

"In the sun," replied Sydney, somewhat shortly; and Haines broke in.

"Might one point out that you have quite a big smudge of soot on your nose?" he inquired.

Lucy held out her handkerchief.

"Then you may go back to the lake and make one side of this just nicely wet."

Haines turned away, and the others laughed when they heard him clattering and stumbling among the boulders. When he came back Lucy glanced at the handkerchief, which was dripping, and raised her brows.

"Oh," she said, "you didn't feel the least desire to keep it?"

"I didn't," answered Haines, with his usual gravity. "I can assure you of the fact. Why should I?"

"In any case, you needn't have wet it through."

Haines turned to the others.

"I appeal to you. Is it possible to wet one side of a handkerchief and keep the other dry?"

"This," said the girl, "confirms my previous opin-

ion. You are evidently a person of no imagination."

By and by they had supper in the woods, and some time after the meal was over Sydney rowed his companions back down the lake. He walked up to the ranch with them, carrying the basket and the kettle, and when he reached it he saw Carteret sitting on the veranda with a newspaper in his hand. The title heading, which was turned toward Sydney, caught the latter's eye, and he recognized it immediately. It was that of an English provincial paper, and, drawing nearer, he contrived with some difficulty to make out the date of it. This and something in the older man's expression had its significance. Sydney felt almost certain that the paper contained an account of the failure of Carteret's bank, or of the inquest, and as he had not been supplied with details of either he was sensible of an intense desire to secure it, though he could not tell how this was to be done.

Carteret folded up the paper with a suggestive haste as Clare, who had been talking to Haines not far away, ascended the few steps to the veranda. It seemed to Sydney that her father did not wish her to see what he had been reading, and this not unnaturally increased his desire to peruse the journal. Carteret waited until the girl had gone into the house, and then following her entered a little room set apart for himself. Sydney, drawing back among the trees, could see him through the window, and when Clare came along the hall and called to him he thrust the paper out of sight beneath some books on a table before she walked into the room.

After that Sydney hung about the ranch splitting wood until dark. He could think of no excuse for borrowing the paper that would not be likely to excite suspicion; and it was only when Carteret, reentering his room, lighted the lamp and took a bundle of letters from a drawer, which suggested that he

would probably remain there for some time, that Sydney proceeded thoughtfully to his own two-roomed dwelling about a mile away. He had been assured that Jim's death was an accident, but he was desperately anxious to see a full account of the inquest, and he was practically sure that the paper contained it.

There was apparently only one way in which he could satisfy this wish, and though that way was hazardous he meant to take it. Waiting until after midnight he walked resolutely back toward the ranch. The bush was wrapped in black shadow, and was so still that when he bent back a branch its low rustle almost startled him. Each twig he trod upon crackled with a harsh distinctness, while the dew on the undergrowth soaked him to the knees. When he approached the ranch, however, bright moonlight streamed down into the clearing, and he sat down on the edge of the shadow to take off his boots before he attempted to cross it. The house was dark, and there was no sign of life anywhere about it.

Twice he trod on something sharp, and once he stubbed his toes cruelly; but he reached the veranda steps and crept up with his heart beating unpleasantly fast. Then as he slipped across the veranda a loose plank rattled alarmingly, and standing in the shadow against the wall for a moment or two he held his breath as he listened. There was, however, no sound in the house, and he had moved forward a few paces when he started again as the shrill cry of some nightbird rang out. He was annoyed to feel that he was wet with perspiration. In another moment he reached the window and, finding it unfastened, as he had expected, he contrived to open it, though it seemed to him that the creak it made must have rung through the whole building. He sat on the ledge listening with strained attention, and then lowered himself very softly into the room.

One ray of moonlight streamed in, but the rest of the place lay in deepest shadow, and he crept through the latter toward the table. He felt the pile of books, but he could not find the paper, and straightening himself he took out a block of the sulphur matches which are generally used in Canada. They ignite almost noiselessly, but they are endued with a very penetrating odor, and after a moment's hesitation he laid the block down on the table and lifted the books one by one. He was some time doing this, for he laid them down very cautiously, but at length he came to the paper. Thrusting it into his pocket, he was just starting for the window when he heard a sound outside the door.

Quickly drawing back a pace or two from the table, he stood very still, tense and strung up, wondering what he should do, for he heard the sound again, and he had no doubt as to its meaning. He fancied that he might still reach the window and fling himself out of it before the door was opened, but as he could not do it noiselessly that would inevitably lead to his being seen before he crossed the moonlit clearing, and he was not certain that the newcomer meant to enter the room. It evidently could not be Carteret, because if the latter wanted anything from his own room it did not seem likely that he would take so much trouble to reach it as silently as possible.

Then the latch clicked, and as the door swung open Sydney shrank a little farther back into the shadow. Where he now stood the door partly shielded him. The next moment he started in bewildered astonishment, for it was a woman's figure, wrapped in what he supposed to be a long dressing-gown, that moved into the ray of moonlight. He could see the conventionalized pattern on the shoulders of the trailing garment, and the gleam of the long hair that flowed down across it, as the wearer moved away from him

across the room toward where, as he had noticed on other occasions, a couple of shelves had been fitted into a recess in the wall. There was no doubt that she was looking for something.

Standing with her back to him, she struck a sulphur match, and the pale blue glimmer of the light just touched the shelves. It became evident that what she was looking for was not on them, for she dropped the match, and, turning, softly crossed the stream of moonlight again. Then Sydney almost betrayed himself by an abrupt movement as he saw that it was Clare Carteret.

She stopped a moment, glancing toward the door, and the blood crept into Sydney's face, for he could see the pale ivory glimmer of her skin between the folds of white lace where the heavy outer garment fell open at her neck, and her little uncovered feet. Then she turned again, and he held his breath as she came straight toward him, for it was now clear that she would never forgive him if she became aware of his presence. Even if he could by any explanation satisfy her father that his purpose in making the visit was innocent, which seemed scarcely likely, he realized that it would be necessary for him to keep away from the ranch while she remained there. He was in his stocking feet, and moving one of them very cautiously he leaned back until his shoulders touched the wall, with the door partly in front of him. He could hardly expect that she would fail to see him if she glanced into the shadow, but he realized in the midst of his anxiety that though she seemed afraid of being heard she would naturally have no suspicion that another person was already in the room.

She laid one hand on the table, and when she apparently felt for the pile of books it suddenly dawned on Sydney that she was searching for the paper which was then in his pocket. She moved the books one

after another, felt about the spot they had occupied, coming so close that she almost touched him, and then with a faint exclamation of impatience straightened herself suddenly and flung her long hair back with a swift, sinuous movement of her head and body which swept the skirt of the trailing garment across his feet. The next moment he set his lips tight and clenched one hand, for she struck the block of matches, which fell with a sharp tap. She stooped and felt for it, and he held his breath once more when she stood up, for if she struck one the pale light would certainly fall upon him. She laid them down, however, and moved away with a soft rustle of light garments and the heavy gown trailing on the floor behind her. Then she slipped out through the door and Sydney gasped with relief. He felt that the past two or three minutes had been the most anxious ones he had ever spent.

He heard her ascend the stairway, and then treading on tiptoe he reached the window and swung himself out of it. In another minute he was across the clearing and putting on his boots, after which he ran back through the shadowy bush to his dwelling. Then he forgot all about Clare, and his face grew set and hard as he read an account of the inquest, though once or twice it softened momentarily and his eyes grew hazy. There were good people in the world, he mused, for one or two of those who admitted that they had been hit very hard by the disaster had clearly done what they could to save the dead man's credit on one point at least. His death was declared an accident, but Sydney felt that in spite of this an unpleasant suspicion would remain in the minds of all those who heard of it. There was no doubt that black disgrace rested upon the name of Carteret.

He lay awake until morning, and getting up heavy-eyed went back to the ranch as soon as he fittingly

could. Carrying a load of stovewood through the house he contrived to slip into Carteret's room and restore the paper to its place on the table. Then he set to work, and finding some relief in strenuous exertion sawed savagely for an hour or two, until Carteret's guests came out and sauntered up and down waiting for breakfast. He decided that it would be advisable for him to take it with them, as he was in the habit of doing, in case any of them had heard him or Miss Carteret moving about the house.

CHAPTER VII

HAINES BECOMES CURIOUS

BREAKFAST was served in a big, match-boarded room with two windows in one side of it looking out upon the lake, and as they stood wide open the fragrance of the firs flowed in. Sydney sat down in his usual place near the foot of the table, and though both Carteret and Mrs. Graham had tactfully made it clear that there was no reason why he should not take part in the general conversation if he wished he was silent during most of the meal. For one thing, the account he had read had been exceedingly painful, and now after grappling with his trouble once more through the hours of darkness he was beginning to wonder what had made Clare anxious to find the paper.

It seemed probable that her father had not told her more than he considered advisable about the disaster, in which case, he decided, she must have guessed that something was being kept back from her, but that did not quite explain why she should be so anxious to acquire the withheld information. There could, he thought, be only one reason for this, and that was that, curious as it seemed, she had actually been to some extent interested in Sydney Carteret. It also seemed possible that she was, perhaps, a little sorry for him. He was slightly astonished to feel a faint thrill as he thought of it, and he glanced toward her diffidently. There were one or two other young women present, as

well as Miss Brattan, who was certainly the most attractive of them, but she was, he had already decided, not to be compared with Clare Carteret.

Lucy Brattan was piquantly pretty, though it seemed to him that provocatively described it more clearly, and when it was turned upon somebody else he had been amused by her somewhat caustic wit, but there were times when in Clare's presence she seemed merely pert. The latter was, as he had reasons for knowing, neither unduly reserved nor prudish, but there was in her manner a half-perceptible, elusive trace of what he thought of as stateliness. She could indulge in badinage, but there were, he felt, in her case always limits which one might not pass, and he had noticed the tactful kindliness with which she had made him and the others feel that he was not to be regarded merely as their hired attendant. Besides all this there was no doubt that she was very well favored physically. He assured himself, however, that he permitted his thoughts to dwell on her only as a means of escape from the trouble which for the last few hours had about overwhelmed him.

They were half through breakfast when Lucy Brattan turned to Carteret during a pause in the conversation.

"Do you keep any spooks about this ranch?" she asked.

"No," replied Carteret, "I never heard of any, and I don't think we have many of them anywhere in Canada. What kind of spooks?"

"Spooks that open windows and shut them again."

It seemed to Sydney that Lucy had flashed a very swift glance at him, and he was certain that she had waited until she could secure everybody's attention before asking the question. Sydney felt uncomfortable, but he had no intention of allowing Lucy to notice his embarrassment.

"That would be a little unnecessary, wouldn't it?" Carteret suggested. "One understands that shut doors and windows don't trouble them."

"Then do you think that any of the others are in the habit of walking in their sleep?"

She glanced at Clare this time, and Sydney fancied that he saw the faintest trace of color creep into the latter's cheek. However, she looked up very composedly.

"If you mean me, I don't believe I ever did anything of that kind in my life."

"The trouble is that you don't know you do it—unless somebody sees you."

Sydney was watching Clare as closely as he dared, and he fancied that she was disconcerted, though he did not think that anybody else, except, perhaps, Miss Brattan, noticed it. He felt, however, that Haines' suggestion that the latter ought to be provided with a muzzle was fully warranted. Then Haines looked up.

"Will you tell us what you saw last night?" he asked.

"What would you do if you thought there was a spook about?" was the prompt rejoinder.

"I should probably throw a boot or anything else that was handy at it."

"Well," said Lucy, "that's where we differ. I immediately put my head under my pillow."

There was a little laughter from the rest, who were evidently becoming interested.

"Did you hear anything?" one of them asked.

The girl made a gesture suggesting that she required attention.

"I heard somebody creeping on tiptoe along the corridor past my room and down the stairs. Before that I heard a window opened, and by and by I heard it shut. Now there are, as most of you have noticed, two doors to this house."

Sydney fancied that Carteret looked a little perplexed, but Haines broke in again.

"I should like to point out that Miss Brattan heard all this with her head under her pillow," he said. "My room is right over the veranda windows, and I heard nothing. As I didn't, it seems to follow that there couldn't have been anything to hear."

"I could hear as well with my head under a pillow as you could when you were asleep," Lucy said defiantly.

"We'll admit that. The only difficulty is that I wasn't asleep. I don't sleep well, and I hardly fancy that any of you would either, if you had been working at high pressure until late every night amid the rush of a big land boom, as I have been doing for the past two months. Anyway, with excuses to Mrs. Graham, I sat by my window smoking a good deal of last night."

Sydney felt that Haines had spoken with a certain significance, but he was not prepared for the announcement that Clare quietly made.

"Well," she observed, "I may tell you that, although I neither saw nor heard it, the spook conferred on me a small favor. It left something behind it that I was rather anxious to see."

Lucy seemed astonished at this, but Sydney suddenly recollected that the newspaper account had made it clear that he had merely suffered by the disaster and had taken no share in the management of the bank. This brought him a sense of satisfaction, for it was plain that if Clare had read the paper, which now seemed probable, she must have noticed that fact.

Then some of the others asked questions, and when it became evident that Clare meant to give them no further information Lucy looked down the table at Sydney.

"I have a suggestion to make," she said. "We'll

put rancher Jardine on guard on the veranda to-night, with definite instructions that if the thing appears again he's to interview it."

"It's understood that one should not speak to them," said a man who sat near Lucy. "I'd go further and tell Jardine that we expect him to get hold of it."

Sydney was annoyed to feel his face growing hot, and it was a minute before he glanced at Clare. He fancied that she was not quite at ease either, but the others let the subject drop, and when breakfast was over he heard, somewhat to his relief, that he would not be wanted that morning. He went back to his ranch, where he had plenty of work on hand. Soon after he had gone, and the others had strolled down to the lake, Mrs. Graham came out on the veranda, where Carteret was sitting with his pipe in his hand.

"I wonder whether there was anything behind that nonsense of Lucy's?" she queried.

Carteret looked reflective.

"It's a question that naturally has occurred to me. I may say that I found a burnt match beneath the shelves in my room this morning, where I certainly didn't drop one, and another that hadn't been struck beneath the table. It's suggestive."

"Did you keep that English newspaper there?"

"I kept it in my desk until last night, when I took it out and foolishly left it lying beneath some books." He turned and looked significantly at his companion. "I happened to see Clare reading it early this morning, though there is very little doubt that she didn't see me, which makes it clear that she couldn't have come down to look for the thing last night."

"Then what do you make of it?"

Carteret smiled.

"It isn't astonishing that I really can't make anything of it at all."

Mrs. Graham left him a few minutes later, and he

sat on the veranda weighing conjecture after conjecture, but none of them seemed to fit the case.

Sydney, in the meanwhile, remembering some instructions that Brodie had given him on the subject, set to work to grub out a big fir. This is a means of bringing down a tree with a bias to one side which is frequently used in the bush, as it extracts part of the roots, whereas a tree that is chopped down leaves them in the ground with a six-foot stump projecting from them. The process, however, entails a good deal of very hard work, as Sydney discovered before he had cleared away most of the soil from the surface roots and chopped them through with the ax. As there was gravel among the soil, and he seldom succeeded in hitting the roots exactly as he wished to, he contrived to make several big notches in the blade. Then he took a shovel, and after clearing out a trench about the tree he began to excavate among the roots with a grub-hoe, which has a long, curved blade with a smaller straight one running across the top of it. One can cut the roots with either, but the larger one is generally employed for raking out the soil that lies among them.

After two or three hours of this work Sydney found it a relief to stop for dinner, which he prepared for himself; and when he had eaten the very unappetizing meal it was with reluctance that he went back to his task. There were, however, it seemed to him, an almost appalling number of trees on his property, and it was evident that he could not expect to do much farming until he had cleared some of them off. He was beginning to acquire the full use of his muscles, and before an hour had passed he had scraped out a hole big enough to crawl into, and had laid bare a fresh array of roots.

Just about this time Clare and Haines and Lucy Brattan strolled along the trail that led to his

ranch, and when they reached the tall split-fence that encircled the clearing they stopped to look about them. They saw a little oblong opening in the bush strewed with fir stumps, about which tall fern clung. Outside the fence rows of great trees lay in the tremendous ruin generally termed the slashing, to wait until the rancher had an opportunity for cutting off their branches and sawing them up, after which the ponderous logs would be hauled together with an ox team, ready for burning. Behind these in turn the forest closed in, solemn, shadowy and apparently impenetrable, but an opening on one side of the clearing afforded an entrancing vista of the blue lake and the tremendous slope of rock that ran up above the climbing forest on the opposite shore.

Lucy, leaning on the fence, slight in figure and elaborately dressed, surveyed the scene with languid interest.

"This is Arcadian," she said. "It must be quite nice to be a rancher's wife—anyway in summer. Simplicity of life appeals to me."

Haines laughed.

"I'm afraid it isn't so nice. I belong to the cities, but I know more than that. Can you seriously imagine yourself getting up at six in the morning to bake and scrub and sew, and wash your husband's clothes?"

Lucy admitted that it was a little difficult to picture herself doing anything of that kind. Then she looked round the clearing again.

"The rancher doesn't seem to be about. I wonder whether we could peep into his cabin?"

Just then a few muffled blows and a curious sound, which suggested a subterranean scuffling, became audible, and Clare glanced toward one of the few big trees which still stood inside the clearing.

"He seems to be under one of them—grubbing it out," she said.

They crossed the clearing, and stopped not far from the tree. There was a dark tunnel under it, and a shower of soil and gravel came flying out of the mouth of this. Then Sydney's feet and part of his back became visible, and the shower of soil grew thicker until it suddenly ceased, and they had a clearer glimpse of him as he crawled across a ray of light that streamed into the hole. His hat had fallen off, his face was hot and flushed, and there was soil all over his garments and in his hair. He evidently did not see the new arrivals, for he wriggled round again, and Lucy laughed.

"Oh," she giggled, "he looks just like a badger."

Another dull thud or two came out of the tunnel, and then it seemed to Clare that the big columnar trunk, which was slightly slanted, moved a little. In another moment she was sure of it. There was no doubt that the man had undermined the tree sufficiently to disturb its equilibrium.

"Come out—quick!" she cried.

There was a scuffling inside the hole, and then a muffled voice rose out of it.

"I can't," it said. "There's a root or two jammed down in front of me."

Clare looked suddenly anxious, and there was uneasiness in Lucy's eyes, while Haines flung a swift glance at the tree.

"It's certainly sinking a little on this side," he declared. "We must get him out as soon as possible."

He jumped into the trench and picked up Sydney's ax, but Clare called to him.

"No!" she said sharply. "Come back! Help me with the extractor!"

Haines, who realized that there was no time to waste, scrambled toward her. He saw that an appliance which looked something like a big screw-jack had been fixed between the base of the tree and a stout plank in the trench. It was fitted with a lever, and

Clare had already seized the latter. Her face had grown white, and her hands were clenched on the bar.

"The tree's just on the balance now," she said. "It won't take much to tilt it. Lucy, you get hold too!"

Haines flung himself upon one end of the lever, and gasped as he dragged at it, for it seemed to him that unless they could tilt the tottering tree it must sink back into the excavation and crush the man beneath it. The noise the latter made suggested that he was struggling savagely.

There was scarcely room for all three of them in the trench, and they fell against one another and the sides of it as they tugged at the lever; but that stump extractor fortunately was a very powerful one of somewhat novel pattern, made to work in confined spaces, and as the big screw revolved the top of it rose steadily little by little. Haines had set his lips, and Clare's face was white and tense, when there was a sharp snapping and rending of roots, and Sydney crawled backward out of the hole. Then the ground seemed to heave beneath their feet, and as they scrambled from the trench a cloud of soil and gravel flew up into the air. The big trunk swayed for a moment or two, and then rushed earthward suddenly. There was a deafening crash as it struck the ground, and in the curious stillness that followed Sydney walked up to Clare. He was smeared all over with soil, and his face was flushed and wet with perspiration.

"Thank you," he said simply. "It doesn't seem quite sufficient, but I don't know what else I can say. It's very probable that if you hadn't acted quickly the tree would have sunk down and flattened me."

Clare appeared a trifle unnerved, which was not astonishing, and Haines, who noticed this, broke in.

"Well," he said, "it's possible, but not quite certain.

Why in the name of wonder didn't you crawl out earlier?"

"I didn't think I'd cut out enough soil, until just before Miss Carteret called two or three bushels of it suddenly fell in on me. Then a big root I'd cut through bent and jammed itself right across the hole. I hadn't room to get at it with the grub-hoe. In fact, in the way I was doubled up I couldn't turn round."

Clare glanced at the hole that the fallen tree had left, and then turned toward Sydney, speaking with a trace of sharpness.

"Why did you do all the grubbing on one side?" she asked. "Couldn't you understand that instead of letting the tree fall the way of its bias you were only restoring its balance?"

"That's clear—now. It seems I have a good deal to learn," replied Sydney, humbly.

Clare did not answer, but turned away from him and summoned her companions with a gesture. Haines, however, did not follow when she moved across the clearing.

"I want a word or two with Jardine," he said.

Sydney, who was too shaken to wonder what it could be about, walked toward his dwelling, and opening the door of the little two-roomed log building pulled out a chair for his visitor and laid a box of cut tobacco, which is a rather unusual thing in the bush of that country, on the table. Haines sat down and filled his pipe and then took up a handful.

"You didn't get that stuff at any of the settlements," he said pointedly.

"No," replied Sydney, a little astonished at his manner, "I sent to Vancouver for it."

"Exactly. The plug the ordinary bush rancher uses isn't good enough for you?"

There was a change in Sydney's expression.

"I certainly don't like it, and I don't know of any

reason why I should do so. May I say that I fail to grasp the drift of these remarks?"

Haines quietly lighted his pipe before answering.

"They're to the purpose. What did you come here for? You know very little about ranching."

Sydney resented this questioning, but he felt that he probably owed the man a good deal.

"That is quite true, but I fancy that there are other men from the cities ranching in this province who don't know very much more about it than I do. I came here to earn my living."

"You hadn't any other motive?"

It cost Sydney an effort to keep his temper, but he accomplished it.

"I'm quite ready to admit that you and the two young ladies got me out of a very awkward fix just now," he said. "Still, I'm not sure that it warrants this catechism."

Haines smiled in a dry fashion.

"It was Miss Carteret who got you out; but it's at least possible that you would have scraped a hole you could crawl through round the root before the tree came down if we hadn't taken a hand in it at all. We'll let it go at that. I feel that I have a right to put these questions for quite a different reason. In the meanwhile you haven't answered me."

"Then, as I told you, I came here to earn my living; and I chose this place because it was the only ranch I could hear of within my means."

Haines leaned forward and looked him steadily in the eyes.

"In that case, what were you doing on Carteret's veranda in your stocking feet very late last night?"

Sydney started, but his resentment suddenly vanished. He liked the man, and he admitted that his attitude was perfectly warranted.

"Well," he confessed, "I'd like to tell you, but I'm

afraid it's out of the question. I may say this, though it will probably seem very difficult to credit: my purpose was perfectly blameless, and could not have resulted in the slightest harm to Carteret or to any of his guests."

"Then you crept into the house to meet somebody?"

The blood swept into Sydney's face as he remembered that Clare must have slipped by the door of his companion's room before she reached the top of the stairway, and he met his gaze with an ominous flash in his eyes.

"You will let this thing drop at once and be satisfied with my answer if you are wise," he suggested. "You have my solemn assurance that I had not the faintest idea of meeting anybody—in fact, nothing was farther from my wishes—when I crept into the ranch."

Haines laughed softly.

"Well," he said, "you can take it as a compliment that I'm satisfied. I would have probed this thing to the bottom if I had felt that you were a different kind of man. As it is, I am sorry if you have taken it the wrong way."

"I don't think I could reasonably blame you," admitted Sydney.

Haines made a little gesture.

"I'll go so far as to drop a warning. Miss Brattan is evidently curious about you, and I shouldn't wonder if you have her on your trail."

"I'm not afraid," laughed Sydney. "May I ask if you have any reasons for believing that Miss Carteret shares her suspicions?"

His companion appeared to reflect.

"No," he replied slowly, "I can't think of any. What put that into your mind?"

"Her manner when she spoke to me soon after the tree went down."

Haines smiled.

"Have you ever seen a woman in the poorer quarter of a town snatch her child up close in front of an express wagon or a street-car?"

"I've seen something of the kind in England."

"Then you may have noticed that she generally spanks it immediately afterward."

Before Sydney could reply, Haines stood up.

"Well, I must be getting on after the others," he said. "It seems to me that it wouldn't be advisable for there to be any further apparitions at Carteret's ranch."

He went out a moment afterward, and left Sydney sitting still with a very thoughtful face.

CHAPTER VIII

CLARE MAKES INQUIRIES

IT was a hot morning, and the heavy stillness of the woods was emphasized by the distant sound of falling water, when Sydney stood beneath a big cedar listening attentively. He had a bundle of hay in one hand, and a coil of stout rope in the other, and he was very hot just then, as well as somewhat out of temper, for he had been trailing his working oxen through the bush for the last two hours, and was still apparently as far as ever from laying hands on them. On the smaller, partially-cleared ranches it is difficult to raise oats or grass enough to feed even a very few head of stock, and the beasts run practically wild in the surrounding bush. They appear to be capable of living on anything, but their owner usually has trouble when he wishes to round them up.

Sydney possessed neither horses nor wagon, but he had in place of them a span of oxen and one of the jumper sleds which are rather common in that country, and as Carteret had asked him to bring up some stores from a ranch a few miles away, where a freighter had arranged to leave them, it was first of all necessary for him to find the beasts. He had, accordingly, set out before breakfast, and had floundered through several quaggy swamps and innumerable thorny thickets, to the detriment of his garments, without catching more than a momentary glimpse of them.

By and by a blue grouse commenced drumming somewhere far off in the top of a big fir, and the sound suggested the rhythmic stroke of an ax. It lasted for some minutes, and soon after it ceased Sydney became suddenly intent as the faint, elfin tolling of a bell stole out of the scented shadow. Then he crept forward as softly as possible, though in spite of his caution branches would rustle and dry undergrowth crackle. He saw little of the huge columnar trunks between which he slipped or the great branches that ran up into the roof of dusky greenery high above his head, for his attention was concentrated upon the thickets in front of him. The sound grew plainer as he proceeded, and at length, struggling waist-deep through a belt of fern, he saw two patches of dappled hide beyond a brake not far away. A little to one side of him an uncovered ridge of rock rose out of the fern, and this showed him that he had worked back toward Carteret's ranch in his wanderings. Then a pair of horns rose above the brake, and holding the rope carefully behind him he thrust forward the bundle of hay.

"Farragut!" he called seductively. "Poor old Farry! Come along, Tillicum!"

A big red and white beast raised its massy head and regarded him with mildly contemplative eyes. Then it walked through the thicket with an ease he envied, and while the bell on its neck set up a mellow tinkling it moved a few paces forward and stopped again. Its companion bounded over the thicket, for the bush-bred ox can run and jump almost like a deer, and came a little nearer, curveting in an absurd sidelong fashion with its tail curled up.

"Tillicum!" called Sydney. "Come up, Tilly!"

He held out the hay, and the big Tillicum, ceasing his gamboling, stopped and apparently sniffed at it, still keeping some yards away, while Farragut stood

blowing softly through his nostrils and watching his master with suspicion. Sydney remembered that he had left his breakfast cooking at least two hours ago, and he made a determined effort to keep his patience.

"Nice old Farry! Come along!" he pleaded.

Farragut looked at the hay, but came no nearer, and Sydney spoke again, in the same seductive voice, though the words were different.

"You villainous, suspicious, old beast!" he said. "It doesn't matter to you that the bottom of my frying-pan is probably burning out by now. You'll find out that you're not expected to behave like a circus horse before this day's over, Tilly!"

The oxen drew a very little nearer, and he leaned forward, holding out the hay, with his muscles strung up, ready for a rush and spring.

"Farry, Farry!" he called soothingly. "Just another yard or two, Tilly!"

Farragut moved another pace, with moist muzzle stretched out toward the hay, and then turned suddenly, while Tillicum jumped sidewise with a bent-up tail. Sydney, who flung the hay away, also jumped, and contrived to bring the rope down on Tillicum's bright flank, after which he hurled a big piece of rotten branch at the oxen, and then stumbling over something as he ran forward, he staggered and plunged headforemost into a thicket. He fancied that he heard a peal of silvery laughter as he shot into it, and when a minute later he crawled out, hot and savage and scratched all over, he was far from pleased to see Clare and Lucy Brattan standing on the ridge of rock. There was no doubt that they were amused.

"Aren't they delightful?" giggled Lucy.

"No," exclaimed Sydney, shortly. "If you had been chasing them half the morning without any breakfast I don't think you'd feel inclined to call them that either."

The girl pursed up her face until it expressed malevolent vindictiveness.

"In that case it would possibly be—you villainous, suspicious, old beast!"

Sydney laughed.

"It was warranted, every word of it. In fact, I'm inclined to fancy that considering the provocation it was rather—feeble."

"What are you going to do now?" asked Clare.

"Trudge after them until I drop," declared Sydney.

"I don't think they have gone very far. Will you let me try what I can do? Give me the hay, and get behind the nearest tree."

Sydney did as she suggested, and when the girl called out softly the oxen appeared again. She divided the hay up, and held it out in both hands, standing amidst the great trunks, knee-deep in the crushed-down fern. A stray shaft of sunlight fell upon her face and thin white dress, forcing up her tall figure against the background of shadowy columns, and there was, it seemed to Sydney, a wonderful grace in her poise. It made Lucy Brattan look almost tawdry as she sat on a fallen trunk in a big hat and filmy draperies.

Clare called again, softly and clearly, and Sydney was not astonished when the big, dappled beasts, which had resisted his choicest blandishments, moved toward her confidently. In another minute she was patting the suspicious Farragut's neck as he quietly munched the hay, and it scarcely seemed fitting to Sydney that she should lead them little by little nearer the spot where he was waiting, though he remembered that Carteret required his stores brought in.

Then he slipped out from behind the trunk and succeeded in getting the rope round Farragut's horns before the ox could break away, after which the big beast, evidently realizing that the struggle was over,

stood quietly still, and his companion stayed with him. Sydney turned to Clare.

"Thank you," he said. "I was greatly tempted, though, to tell you to let them go."

Lucy, who had approached them in the meanwhile, favored him with a smile.

"Now," she declared, "that is quite a pretty idea."

"I really felt like a traitress," said Clare.

She turned away with this, and Sydney plodded back through the bush, with the now docile oxen walking after him, though, being acquainted with Farragut's character, he kept a good hold on the rope. When he reached his dwelling he found, as he had partly expected, the kettle boiled dry and the bottom burned out of his frying-pan. As the result of this he made his breakfast on cold pork and tough flapjacks left over from the previous day, and set out soon afterward with the jumper sled. This consisted simply of a rude platform laid on two small logs provided with iron runners, and the oxen hauled it by a chain made fast to their yoke. On the outward journey they occasionally wandered away into the forest in search of something to eat, in spite of Sydney's most vigorous remonstrances. He was accustomed to horses, but the driving of oxen is a different matter, and very few beginners acquire any proficiency in it without a serious loss of temper. Sydney, however, succeeded in reaching the ranch where the stores had been left, and after staying there to dinner set out for home in the afternoon. The slowly-plodding beasts had covered most of the distance when he lay upon the jumper with his pipe in his hand as they proceeded quietly down a long slope.

It was very hot, the fragrance of the firs that met above the narrow trail was heavy in the air, and he leaned against a case, looking about him in a state of half-somnolent content. On either side rose the

serried trunks, and a little fitful breeze stirred with a faint sighing high up among the towering spires. Below, there was dim shadow, with here and there a ray of sunlight breaking through, and the ever-present sound of running water came out of it soothingly. Sydney was beginning to feel satisfied with the new country, though he admitted that he would probably find things different when the Carterets went back to the city. That, however, was a point he felt very reluctant to dwell upon.

By and by he caught the gleam of a white dress in the shadow, and a moment or two later Clare came out upon the trail. She was looking down it with her back toward him, and he tapped the oxen with the pointed stick he carried, half afraid that she would vanish before he came up with her. She turned round when the oxen reached her, and Sydney rose as they stopped.

"I suppose you haven't seen anything of the others?" she asked.

"No," replied Sydney, "I haven't seen anybody. In a way, if I had done so it would have been a pity."

"A pity?"

"Yes. One feels on a perfect, still afternoon of this kind that smartly-dressed city people, who must talk about something, would be out of place in the woods. They're so very old and drowsily quiet, you see. Of course," and he made a little whimsical gesture, "I'm afraid that I'm almost as much of an intruder, but it's a good deal easier to be lenient to oneself."

Clare smiled at this.

"In that case, why did you stop the oxen when you saw me?"

"I'm not quite sure that they didn't stop of their own accord because they wished to, and, anyway, what I said didn't apply to you. You fit into the general

harmonies of the scheme. One feels—it's the only way I can express it—that you're in key."

There was truth in this. Lucy Brattan not infrequently looked out of place in the bush, as did most of the other guests, but Clare never did. Perhaps it was the effect of a certain over-vivacity or artificiality in their manner; perhaps it was partly their dress; but it seemed to Sydney that there was something in Clare, a depth of character, a reserve and quietness, that somehow set her apart from the rest. Just then, however, he saw a gleam of amusement in her eyes.

"You mentioned that the woods were so drowsily quiet. The connection doesn't seem to be very plain," she said.

"Well," returned Sydney, "to please you we'll leave out the drowsiness. I think that wasn't quite what I meant. We'll say that they're filled with a deep and restorative tranquillity."

The girl laughed, but Sydney was not surprised that she showed no sign of resenting the freedom of his speech, though he was then employed by her father in a very humble capacity. The latter fact, however, did not count for very much in the bush, and he realized that she had sense enough to understand that he had not sought an opportunity for paying her a compliment. There was a certain distinction between this and whimsically expressing what he felt. For all that he changed the subject.

"The others have strayed off somewhere?"

"I almost believe they went deliberately. Lucy desired to give Haines a lesson in botany, which I believe she knows very little about. Simcoe and Hetty Hayton wanted to see the cascade, and they have probably gone home by the other trail as they haven't come back. Anyway, I don't feel inclined to wait for them."

"It's two miles to the ranch," said Sydney. "Did

you ever ride on a jumper sled, Miss Carteret? It's rather soothing on a hot afternoon when the trail's not very bad."

Clare said that she had done so once or twice, and Sydney walked into the bush and cut off an armful of twigs from a young spruce to make a seat for her. Then he started the oxen, and walked beside the sled, which slid more or less smoothly over the soft surface of the trail. He had, however, forgotten that he had left his pipe lying on one of the cases, and it presently caught Clare's eye. She could read the letters S. J. on the band and remembered having noticed on another occasion that they were followed by C. She quietly turned it over to make certain.

"S. J. C.! That might stand for Sydney Jardine Carteret!" she exclaimed, on the spur of the moment and with no particular reason, except that the sight of the letters had suggested the idea.

Sydney started. He could not help it, which was not altogether unnatural, for he failed to recognize that she had spoken on impulse, half-consciously, but he braced himself to face the situation.

"Yes," he said, "that's exactly what it does mean."

He fancied that the girl was almost as astonished as he had been, which seemed to indicate that she could not have had any positive ground for making the disconcerting suggestion. This led him to believe that he might still avoid betraying himself.

"In fact," he added, "he had the pipe specially made for him. On some points he used to be rather pernickety."

"Then you knew him?"

"Of course. The fact that his pipe is in my possession naturally indicates it."

"What was he like?" asked Clare.

"In which way—physically?"

"You can begin at that."

Sydney looked reflective, and, as a matter of fact, he was thinking earnestly, for he desired to answer as honestly as possible, and the situation was becoming somewhat difficult.

"Well," he replied, "he was rather like me, and of much the same height. In one way that's quite natural. I suppose I belong to a not uncommon English type."

He was once more astonished at the girl's comment.

"Yes," she said, "Lucy suggested not long ago that there was a certain similarity among young Englishmen. I don't know whether she meant that it was in their personal appearance, but she said they were all alike. No doubt that's why I have sometimes fancied that Sydney Carteret must have resembled you. But won't you go on?"

Sydney pursed up his face. He did not know whether she wished him to praise the man who was supposed to be dead, but there was certainly no reason why he should cast any unnecessary discredit upon his own character.

"In some respects he was a rather likable man," he said. "Anyway, he generally made good friends. At the same time he was careless, and what one might call indifferent. He drifted along and took life easily. Never did anything worth while, but on the other hand I don't think he ever willingly harmed anybody. You have probably come across that kind of man."

"It's a type that's rather scarce in Canada," answered Clare, and then sat silent for a moment or two. "I believe he is blamed for helping to ruin hundreds of people in England."

A sparkle crept into her companion's eyes.

"Then," he declared, "they're utterly wrong. It's the last thing Sydney Carteret could possibly have done. He never had the smallest share in the management of the bank, and the disaster must have ruined

him. I believe that all he saved out of it was a block of mining shares that couldn't be sold."

He fancied there was a suggestion of relief in Clare's face.

"Did you know that he is dead?" she asked.

"I was told that he had been killed by a landslide shortly before I came here."

Clare appeared to reflect.

"It was very dreadful, and I can't help feeling that there was something mysterious about the affair. It is strange that his companion, Hilton, seems to have disappeared immediately afterward."

"Hilton was killed," said Sydney, unguardedly.

Clare looked at him in astonishment.

"No," she corrected, "it was Carteret. They were not both killed. If you heard anything about it you must have been told that."

"Of course," acknowledged Sydney, with a trace of disconcertion, "I was confusing them. It was Hilton who got away."

"How could you confuse them if Carteret was a friend of yours?"

"Well," explained Sydney, "as it happens, Hilton was a friend of mine, too. At least, I met him farther back east among the mountains, and rather took to him. He disappeared, you say. What is supposed to have become of him?"

"It is only known that a stranger, who appeared to be an Englishman, left one of the railroad settlements by a Vancouver train shortly after the accident."

"He couldn't have had any wish to evade inquiries."

"Oh, no," said Clare. "Nobody seems to believe that. The Indian's story of the accident is clear enough. Still, one feels inclined to wonder why he didn't wait and offer all the information in his power."

Sydney made no comment. He was becoming intensely anxious to get away from the subject, and it

was a relief to him when two of Carteret's guests walked out of the bush on to the trail a little farther on. They were hot and tired, and when they sat down on the sled he walked ahead beside the oxen until they reached the ranch.

CHAPTER IX

THE NEW ROD

THE fires of sunset were fading to a dull red glow among the serried trunks, and the topmost sprays of the redwoods and cedars cut against the green transparency overhead as though fretted in ebony, when Sydney knelt in the stern of the canoe cautiously dipping the paddle. He had now learned the trick of it, and was holding the craft stationary against the rush of stream while Clare, kneeling in the waist, plied a light trout rod. A very small error of judgment on the part of either would, in all probability, have resulted in a capsize, but in their case the hazard lent a zest to the amusement.

Close ahead the river fell tumultuously into the whirling pool, and just then the surface of the latter was dimpled everywhere with quick splashes. The trout, which had lain close all day, disdaining any lure, were feeding voraciously, as they would do for another few minutes until the hum of the myriad insect wings grew suddenly still. After that no cunning counterfeit of anything that moved in air or water would tempt them.

"A little farther up the stream," said Clare. "There's that big one rising again. I must try to cast over him."

She swung the light rod round in a fine sweep, checked it while the canoe rocked wildly and the line

shot across the pool. It tightened almost as it fell, and there was a sharp clicking of the reel, until the girl placed her thumb on it and held up the bending point of the rod. Then the line ripped through the eddies toward the canoe, and after a quick sweep Sydney flung the paddle down and grasped the net.

"Another half-pounder! You can hold on!" he cried.

The rod bent farther, there was a sharp splashing and an evanescent silvery gleam, and Sydney whipped up the net and broke the flapping creature's neck.

"Nearly a dozen in half an hour. Aren't you content?"

Clare laughed.

"The trouble is that this half-hour is all you can get unless you rise before the sun. Anyway, I want the big one that's rising yonder."

She swung the rod again, and after a few more casts there was another splash and whirring of the reel, and another fish of no great weight was added to the pile.

"It's getting rather late. I don't see the others anywhere," suggested Sydney.

"That's not astonishing," laughed Clare. "They went at least a quarter of an hour ago. I suppose I should have gone with them, but I didn't. Lucy's in the other canoe with Haines, and I scarcely felt equal to walking home with Simcoe."

"It is rather a long way," said Sydney.

"It is," she assented, with a laugh. "That, however, was not exactly what I meant."

Sydney said nothing. Simcoe was prosy in his conversation, and had now and then paid Clare somewhat cumbrous compliments. He was pleased to hear that she did not wish to walk home with the man, but at the same time he wondered whether any of the others had noticed that she had been left behind with her hired attendant rather frequently of late. Neither of them,

however, had consciously done anything to arrange this. It had come about, as he assured himself, quite naturally, and it was certainly not his part to make objections.

The next cast was followed by a heavier strain on the line and a little excited cry from Clare.

"Oh!" she cried, "I've got the big one now!"

There was no doubt that it was a strong and heavy fish, for though Clare kept the butt down the line ran wildly toward the head of the pool. The strain eased, however, and she spun the reel in frantic haste as the line came back, until Sydney thrust the canoe astern with a vigorous sweep of his paddle. That took up the dangerous slack, but for the next few minutes it was hard work to keep the canoe clear of the line. He knew that one rasp against the side of it would in all probability suffice to break the gut trace. The stream ran strong in swirling eddies, and the canoe lurched and turned with them as he drove it to and fro, for the fish seemed intent on diving under the bottom of the boat. In the meanwhile Clare, steadying herself on one knee, rose half upright, and several times it seemed almost certain that she and her companion would be flung out into the river. It is particularly easy to upset the ordinary Siwash canoe.

Once or twice she flung sharp instructions at Sydney, but for the most part they fought it out in silence, working together, and realizing each other's purpose subconsciously without spoken words. Even then, as, strung up and intent, he dipped the paddle, Sydney noticed the girl's lithe grace of movement, her fearlessness and quickness, and rejoiced in them. A good deal, as he knew, depended on him, but he realized that he could not have handled the canoe as he was doing if he had had a different companion. There was, he felt, something in each of them that reacted upon and animated the other.

In the meanwhile the light was dying out rapidly. Sydney could scarcely see the line, and the fish revealed its presence only now and then by a faint silvery gleam, while once or twice it was with difficulty that Sydney drove the canoe clear of a boulder that rose out of the current. At length, as they swung with an eddy he edged the craft in toward a sloping bank of shingle, and when the bows grounded Clare stepped lightly ashore. A few moments later Sydney was standing knee-deep with the landing-net, sinking it quietly beneath the still struggling fish. Then he made a quick upward sweep, and came ashore dripping, with the victim safe inside the net. He killed it and took out the fly before he turned to Clare.

"It's much the best we've had yet. A lake fish," he announced. "You won't mind my saying that you ran it cleverly?"

Clare stood still looking at him, and the thrill of the conflict was in her yet.

"Oh," she said, "I suppose I did, but I couldn't have done it unless you had seconded me." She stopped a moment with a little laugh. "That, however, doesn't quite express it. There were one or two moments when, if you had only seconded me, the trout would certainly have broken the trace."

"You mean that we acted simultaneously?" suggested Sydney. "In a way, it's curious that I seemed to know exactly what you meant to do, though it wasn't always the obvious thing."

He wished he could see the girl's face clearly, but it was getting too dark for this.

"I believe it is what I did mean," she admitted and then flung a quick question at him. "Did you feel the same on the evening when Lucy got broken by a good fish?"

"No," Sydney assured her, "not in the least. The result of it was that I almost upset the canoe, the fish

got away, and Miss Brattan was rather vexed with me."

Then he stooped to take up the rod.

"I'm awfully sorry," he added. "The middle joint's smashed. I'm afraid I must have put my foot on it. Anyway, if you'll leave it with me I think I could splice the thing to-morrow."

Clare tried to recall their movements since he had landed the trout, and it seemed to her that she must have been nearer to the rod than he had been. Besides this, she remembered that in her excitement she had dropped it suddenly upon the stones. It was, she decided, characteristic of him that if there were any doubt he should take the blame upon himself.

"It doesn't matter anyway," she declared. "I never liked the rod. The weight wasn't in the right place, and it was heavy on my wrist. In fact, I've been meaning to buy another—one of those American jointed ones—for some time. They can't very well break if you drop them." Then she glanced at the dusky bush. "We must really be getting home."

Sydney turned toward the river. There had been rain the last few days and a good deal of water was coming down. The roar it made rang in long pulsations through the shadowy woods.

"There are a good many big boulders in the next rapid, and the water's rather high," he said. "Haines and I had to portage the canoe round it coming up. I almost think it would be wiser to walk back through the bush, though the fern will be getting very wet."

"You said that because you felt that you ought," laughed Clare. "You haven't any very strong objections to running the rapid?"

"You want to go down?"

"I mean to. That frees you of any responsibility. Won't you get into the canoe?"

Sydney did as he was bidden. He felt that he

should have expostulated, but he could not do it. After all, there was no great hazard, and he fancied that the curious exhilaration of which he had been sensible during the last few minutes was to some extent shared by Clare. In any case, he thrust the canoe off and knelt astern, braced for the effort, with hands clenched tight upon the paddle haft, gazing into the gloom ahead while dim rocks and shadowy trees flitted by. Then there was a plunge, and the canoe leaped forward with lifted bow while a white wave boiled about her. He could dimly see Clare kneeling in front of him, but though she held a paddle he said no word to her when a big boulder came flying back toward them through a rush of froth. He felt that to do so would somehow spoil the thing. They flashed past the boulder, charged down upon another, and scraped by; then plunged madly down a tumultuous track of foam.

It was wonderfully exhilarating. The lash of the cold wind and spray upon his cheeks seemed to set his blood tingling. Trees and rocks flew up faster and faster toward them; the craft lurched and plunged, swung in the eddies, and shot between half-seen masses of stone, until there was a wild swoop and thud, and they were flying out again upon a slow and even stream. Then Clare laid down her paddle with a soft laugh.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "that was splendid!"

Sydney admitted it, but he was afterward silent until they reached the lake. Clare had shown him a new phase of her character, and it was one that appealed to him. There was a vein of the primitive in his nature, and he could sympathize with her strong delight in what he would have called elemental things—the pitting of human skill against the cunning of the fish, and human nerve and quickness against the blind forces of rock and river. That was not all, however.

He fancied that she rejoiced, as he did, in the silence and dimness of the primeval bush, and that the unchanging song of the river had the same charm for her. It was, however, quite clear that he had never felt it quite so deeply as he did just then.

A half-moon sailed up above the dark fir branches when they reached the lake, and the howl of a distant timber wolf fell faintly from a dim hillside. Another answered it across the water, and then there was a silence so deep and solemn that he felt it would scarcely be a fitting thing to speak. The rhythmic splash of the paddle and the gurgle at the bows intensified it; and the cold, ethereal moonlight spread slowly, driving back the shadow.

At length Clare broke the silence.

"A pile of fish, a rapid run—and this! Has England anything much better to offer one?"

"No," admitted Sydney, "if one must be candid. I don't think it has."

His companion laughed.

"On the surface, what I said must have sounded a little barbarous. I wasn't, however, thinking most of the capture of a dozen trout."

"Of course," said Sydney, who was somewhat astonished at himself, "you had in mind the grandeur of these mountains, the glamour in the smell of the dew-touched firs, the health and vigor one breathes in here; the drip of the soil; the way you're appealed to by unspoiled nature."

Clare, sitting in the moonlight, seemed to make a sign of half-amused assent.

"Yes," she agreed, "something of that kind; but, after all, England must have a good deal to offer one. You must sometimes wish to be back again?"

"No," replied Sydney, with evident sincerity, "I don't think I do. To begin with, England has nothing but the cold shoulder to offer me." He broke off for

a moment, and there was a faint wistfulness in his laugh. "To others it might be different. With one part of the community life goes smoothly there. As you suggest, the cream of all that's best is offered them—music and art to those who like them, amusements wholesome and the other kind, the quietness of the green country, the pageant of the season in town. Our country houses are beautiful in summer, with the oaks and beeches about them, and the tennis nets on the big smooth sweep of lawn. Then there is a zest in the stir of the streets when the theaters are emptying in town—the glare of the lights, the roar of the hoofs, the dresses, the hooting motors, the flitting hansoms, the swing and rush of it all. Besides, one meets cheerful acquaintances everywhere. As long as you do as the others do people are really kind to you."

Clare smiled at the last sentence. In his case, at least, the statement did not seem astonishing, for the man was eminently likable.

"Whether that life is as good as this one is another question, of course," he added, with an air of grave reflection which she found amusing. "Anyway, there are times when one gets tired of it and longs to break away. As a matter of fact, a good many of us do."

"That is perfectly comprehensible," smiled Clare. "One is very apt to get tired of the things one is accustomed to, however pleasant they may be. For example, I have always thought that I should like just a year of the life in England you have described." She laughed softly. "In a way, it's only natural. One wants to try one's wings."

"Your wings would carry you high over there. They've grown strong and white in a different atmosphere."

Clare appeared to disregard this.

"There was a time when it seemed probable that the wish might be gratified," she said reflectively.

"And you were pleased with the prospect?" Sydney asked with a certain eagerness, for it seemed to him that she must be thinking of the opportunities that he once could have offered her.

"No," she replied slowly, "not altogether. In some respects it appealed to me; but there were—difficulties—in the way. I am not sure that they could have been got over. Something, however, suddenly placed it altogether out of the question."

Sydney let the paddle trail in the water as he glanced at her. She was not looking at him, but her face was clear in the moonlight, and from its pensiveness and her stillness he fancied that she had been trying to analyze her own feelings when she answered him.

"You must have regretted that?" he suggested.

The girl did not reply immediately.

"Yes," she said at length, "I think I did—perhaps more than I should at one time have considered it possible that I could have done." Then her manner changed suddenly. "We are still some way from home, and it is getting late."

Her companion dipped the paddle with a vigorous stroke, and while the gleaming drops ran from it as it rose and fell, the gurgle grew louder about the bows. Rapid action was a relief to him, for he was troubled, and at the same time half pleased. She had given him cause for believing that she was sorry for Sydney Carteret, and that now and then she thought of him with at least a trace of regret. On the other hand, he admitted that if she thought of him with any tenderness it was, perhaps, only because he was supposed to be dead. The situation was a somewhat difficult and unusual one; but one point, at least, was perfectly clear. If disaster had not befallen him, and he was as free now to seek her favor as he had been a month or two ago, Clare Carteret should have had an opportunity for trying her wings in England. That, how-

ever, was out of the question, and he endeavored to assure himself that he had enough sense and strength of will to accept the inevitable without undue regret. After all, it was only a few weeks since he had first seen her.

He said nothing more, but paddled steadily, and by and by a light blinked out across the lake. Soon afterward he ran the canoe in upon the shingle and walked beside her silently to the house, carrying the string of fish, which he laid down on the veranda. Then she merely said good-night to him, and he plodded back to his ranch and wrote a letter to Vancouver before he went to sleep. Rising early the next morning he set out on a long walk through the bush with it, and a week later a freighter brought him a package from the railroad. An hour after it was delivered to him he walked over to Carteret's house and found Clare sitting alone on the veranda. It was with some diffidence that he laid a new rod on a little table near her.

"I wonder whether you would use this one instead of the other, Miss Carteret," he said. "You see, I'm not very sure of that splice."

The girl took it up, and for a moment or two it was evident that she recognized only its fine proportioning and the excellence of the workmanship. Then Sydney noticed a slight change in her expression.

"Let me put it together and you can see how it feels to your wrist," he broke in hastily.

He did so, and when he handed it to her there was no doubt of her appreciation.

"It's an exceptionally good rod," she said. "It's lighter than the other, and comes up without any weight upon the hand. Stiff, too, with just the right spring. I don't like them too whippy." Then she laid it down again, and Sydney once more felt uneasy as she added, "But I didn't tell you to get me another rod."

"You didn't," Sydney admitted. "Nobody told me. I just sent for it."

Clare turned and looked at him quietly.

"I don't think I can take this gift from you."

"But I broke the last one," argued Sydney.

"That's not quite certain, and even if we granted it, what does it count for? You broke an oar the other day, didn't you?"

"To be precise," answered Sydney, "I've broken a number of things—a whipsaw of your father's, the handle of the cross-cut, and an ax, among the rest. Still, I don't understand how that affects the case."

"It was never suggested that you should replace them."

Sydney made a little whimsical gesture.

"One expects a few odd accidents of that kind. They're part of the wear and tear to be counted on about a ranch, but I can't think of any reason why you should have to use a spliced rod because of my clumsiness."

"Are you absolutely sure that it was—your—clumsiness?"

Sydney disregarded this, and looked at her steadily, with a faint flush in his face.

"Well," he confessed, "since you drive me to it, I'm going to admit that you and your father have treated me very decently, and that attending you and the others fishing is a good deal nicer than chopping big trees for the trail-cutters or shoveling railroad ballast, which, if you hadn't taken me in hand, is no doubt what I should have had to do. As you evidently don't consider the hired man outside the pale in this country, why should I be debarred from showing my appreciation? Would you have made any difficulty if Haines or Simcoe had given you the rod?"

Clare met his gaze, and there was, it seemed to him, something particularly gracious in her manner.

"That last argument is unanswerable," she said. "Well, I will keep the rod. It is certainly an exceptionally fine one."

Sydney swung around and left the veranda somewhat abruptly, with a curious warmth at his heart.

CHAPTER X

THE CARTERET SHARES

DUSK was settling down outside when Carteret sat at a table in his room with several open letters spread out before him. He had a cigar in one hand, and the blue smoke rose from it in a delicate corkscrew trail athwart the light of the shaded lamp which fell upon his face. It showed the lines on his forehead, the heavy drawn-down brows, and the wrinkles about his eyes, for there was no doubt that Carteret was just then in a thoughtful mood, though his expression suggested that he was by no means displeased. Leaning back, he watched the trail of smoke.

The window was open wide, but he did not seem to hear the voices and laughter which suddenly broke out in the clearing, and it was not until the door swung open that he looked up. It was Haines who came in, and he stopped just inside the threshold when he saw the older man.

"Sorry if I disturbed you, sir," he said. "In fact, I didn't think you were here, and I merely looked in to see if I could borrow a Tacoma paper. Our people haven't written me for some time, and I feel I have to keep myself posted about the drift of things."

Carteret pointed to one or two newspapers lying on a chair.

"They're evidently still going strong down Puget Sound. Building lots seem to be in great demand

round the new town sites they're laying out. Won't you sit down and take a cigar?"

Haines did so, and opened one of the papers. As he laid it down a minute or two later, he smiled.

"It's eminently satisfactory news. I see one or two big deals recorded in which we have a share, and if our people have handled things as they generally do, they should have piled up a good deal of money lately. Still, it's not wise to bank too much on a land boom, and I feel inclined to try a venture in something else. I wonder whether you could put me on to a sure snap in mines?"

There was a trace of dryness in Carteret's smile.

"One's friends don't always thank one afterward for a favor of that description, and I don't suppose I need tell you that anything of the nature of a sure snap in mining stock is singularly hard to find. I may, however, perhaps say this. If you come across any Long Divide Silver at half its face value it should be reasonably safe to buy—and hold. On the other hand, I must admit that I once let some relatives of mine in rather heavily over the same stock."

Haines laughed.

"You want that stock in the hands of men who would send you in their proxies and support the directors' policy?"

"Exactly," affirmed Carteret. "The point is, that as far as I can see it would be well worth their while. That's about all I can tell you at the moment."

"A hint sometimes goes a long way," laughed Haines.

His companion did not answer this but changed the subject.

"Had you any luck fishing?"

"I hadn't much. Simcoe had three or four pounds, but Miss Carteret beat him easily. He said it was due to the new rod she was using. I offered to bet him a

new fly-book that if they changed she would do it again, but Miss Carteret wouldn't hear of it. She admitted that something was due to the rod."

Carteret raised his eyebrows, but the next moment his face resumed its usual expression.

"It's very probable," he said; "the old one was too whippy, though I bought it for her."

Haines, who was quick to notice things, went out soon afterwards, wondering whether he had been altogether judicious in mentioning the matter. A few minutes later Clare came in.

"The rise was rather poor, but I managed to get a few sizable fish," she announced.

"Oh, yes," said Carteret, "so I heard. You had a new rod, hadn't you?"

His eyes rested on her face for just a moment, but that was long enough, and she leaned on the back of a chair, smiling at him.

"Yes," she answered, "Jardine gave it to me. He seems to fancy that he broke the other; and it certainly was broken, though I'm not quite sure which of us did it. Anyway, he sent to Vancouver for a new rod. It's an American jointed one."

Carteret was silent for a moment, and the girl was uneasily conscious that he was watching her.

"Well," he observed, "a good rod of that kind is rather a costly thing for a man with a small half-cleared ranch to buy; but I don't know of any particular reason why he shouldn't have given it to you."

"No," responded Clare; "if I hadn't felt that you would look at it in that way I would certainly not have taken the thing."

"Of course," smiled Carteret, "that is quite clear to me."

When she went out, however, he looked a little thoughtful; and his attention was not fixed on the letters in front of him when Mrs. Graham came in

shortly afterward. She had some embroidery and a work-bag in her hand, and she sat down in an easy chair and smiled when a burst of laughter rose from the veranda.

"The young folks are a little noisy, and I don't want to put any restraint on them," she said. "If I sit here for half an hour, I won't worry you?"

Carteret smiled at her.

"Have you ever done that, Jean? As it happens, I'm not particularly busy."

"Then there's nothing of any special importance in your letters?"

Carteret took up one of them and gazed at it reflectively.

"Well," he informed her, "something has turned up that interests me, and it may necessitate my going away for two or three days. It seems that they have at last worked into a vein of really promising ore at Long Divide."

"Silver?"

"No; there's a proportion of silver in it, but it's the copper I'm counting on. I've almost decided to go over and see Neilson about it to-morrow. As it's rather a rough journey I shall probably take Jardine with me."

"How does that young man impress you?" asked his companion, looking at him keenly.

"In a general way, I like him."

Their eyes met, and each was conscious that there was more the other could have said. Then Carteret let the subject drop.

"It's curious that I don't seem able to get away from the results of that English disaster," he said. "Just when I was beginning to get it out of my mind the news from Long Divide reopens the thing."

"How is that? Long Divide was one of your few unfortunate ventures, wasn't it?"

Carteret smiled.

"I have always clung to the idea that it would turn out a success eventually; but I'll try to explain the thing to you. To begin with, Florence Carteret, Sydney's mother, had some means of her own; and shortly before she died, several years ago, she sent me a draft to buy her mining stock. As you know, her husband several times backed me in the old days, and on almost every occasion the deal proved satisfactory to both of us. Long Divide, however, turned out to be an exception, for it only twice paid a cent or two on the dollar after I put Florence's money into it, besides a good deal of my own. Still, for several reasons, I never quite lost faith in the mine, and though the stock was, as a rule, almost unsalable, I contrived to keep the concern on its feet and going. As a big holder, and having that block of Florence's stock under my control, I was able to head off one or two of the others who would have wound it up. There are not many holders. It isn't a big mine."

"Well?" prompted his companion.

"When Florence Carteret died, the stock was transferred to Sydney's name. It was her private property and she bequeathed it to him. Now when there's a certain probability that the Long Divide will pay handsomely I don't quite know what to do about that stock."

"If it belonged to Sydney, couldn't his relatives claim it?"

"It's certain that they haven't. If he had made a will, his executors would have had it transferred to them; but, so far, we have heard nothing about it from anybody, which is rather curious. Of course, as there were only the two brothers, he had no near relatives, and everybody would naturally suppose him to be ruined."

"Then what do you propose to do about the shares?"

"For a while, anyway, as the stock is practically unsalable, I shall probably let the thing slide. When I'm a little more sure about the prospects of the mine I'll get an English lawyer to make inquiries. At any rate, I'll take Jardine and start for the mine to-morrow." Then he rose. "I suppose we'd better join the others. They seem to be quieter now."

Early the next morning Sydney was sent for, and on reaching the ranch he found Clare on the veranda.

"My father wants you to go away with him to look at a mine, and as it's a rather difficult journey I should like for you to see that he doesn't tire himself too much," she requested. "He was in the doctor's hands a few weeks ago, and was warned against undertaking any severe exertion. You will make the thing as easy for him as you can, won't you?"

Sydney promised to do what he could; and an hour or two later he walked several miles through the bush carrying Carteret's valise, until they reached the house of a rancher, who drove them in to the railroad. When they left the train they hired horses at a little settlement and spent the greater part of two days riding over a rough and, in places, almost precipitous trail, before they reached a little hollow in a pine-shrouded hillside. As they rode into it Carteret pointed to a chimney-stack which rose from among the trees with the letters L. D. C. on it.

"That's the Long Divine mine, and I'm not sorry that we're here at last," he said. "It's several years since I have ridden so far."

Sydney started. As it happened, he had not heard the name of the mine they were going to visit, and now it proved to be the one in which he held shares, though he had tried and failed to sell these a few months ago. At his brother's suggestion, he had brought the stock certificate with him to Canada, in case the shares should be in greater demand there, but

on being told by a Montreal banker that they were unmarketable he had left the certificate with the latter. He looked about him with quickening interest as they rode out from among the trees, but there was very little to see beyond the rows of fir-stumps, a big dump of broken rock and débris, and a couple of iron-roofed buildings resting against the steep hillside. In one place a few blue shirts and workmen's trousers were flung upon the stumps, apparently to dry, and there were old provision cans scattered here and there. It seemed to him that the mine and all its adjuncts formed an ugly blot upon the mountain side.

There were a good many questions he should have liked to ask, but he decided to lead up to them judiciously later on if possible.

Presently a man came out from one of the buildings and greeted Carteret, and they went away together, leaving Sydney to attend to the horses. He afterward had supper with the miners, and did not see Carteret again until the morrow. In the meanwhile he made friends with the men, but failed to obtain any information about the mine. From something in their manner he fancied that they had been warned not to be communicative.

While Sydney got the horses ready on the following morning Carteret sat talking with the manager.

"We have got hold of a safe thing now," declared the manager. "Still, in view of the mine's history, you're probably going to have some trouble in getting the stockholders to sanction what we mean to do. One would scarcely expect them to jump at a costly scheme."

"Yes," assented Carteret, "that's a point that will require some consideration. There are certainly three or four people who'll go dead against the project; but we'll probably carry it, anyway, if I can get proxies from the holders of the stock."

Then they talked of other matters until Sydney appeared, when the manager glanced at the trail that led into the bush.

"It's a stiff ride back to Jordan's place, and some bits of it are very rough," he said.

"I'm not looking forward to it with any pleasure," Carteret admitted. "I felt played out when I got in last night, and I haven't quite recovered yet."

"Well," suggested the manager, reflectively, "it would be a little farther to the railroad, but you'd find it considerably easier if you took the trail to the lake. There are a couple of canoes at the landing, and if you tethered your horses there I could send one of the boys along for them. Your man could paddle you down the lake. It's about twelve miles to Vosper's place, where you could sleep, and I've no doubt he would let you have his team to-morrow."

Carteret decided to take this route; and a couple of hours afterward he and Sydney dismounted where the trail led out upon the shingle beside the water. They left their horses tethered to a fir, and taking the smaller of the two canoes started down the lake. It was, like most of the others in that country, girt about with mountains; but all their summits were hidden, and only the dark forests on their lower slopes emerged from heavy trails of leaden mist. There was a curious livid gleam upon the water, and when they crept round a long boulder point they found a chilly wind blowing against them. Carteret glanced about him somewhat uneasily.

"It looks like a change, but I dare say we can get down to Vosper's before it arrives," he said. "I understand that there's not another house of any kind between here and there."

It occurred to Sydney that twelve miles against a head wind was rather a long way, but there was not much weight in it as yet, and Carteret took one of the

paddles in spite of Sydney's expostulations. The elder man paddled for an hour, during which the breeze steadily freshened, before he let the paddle drop, and Sydney toiled on alone. He had become proficient at the back-feather by now, but each fresher puff of wind caught the craft's tall, projecting bow and increased his labor. The ripples which had run against them had changed by degrees to little splashing waves that tumbled about the canoe and flung the spray all over them; and Sydney found very little shelter when he edged her in close to the shore. There was no doubt that he was growing tired, but he held on while a searching rain began to fall.

In half an hour he was wet to the skin, and he fancied that Carteret, who sat amidships with the rain dripping from the light overcoat he had carried with him, could not be much drier. By and by a point ahead of them offered a partial lee, and driving the canoe in close beneath the dark fir branches he stopped paddling.

"It looks rather bad, sir, and we have probably six or seven miles still to go," he said. "The trouble is that if we turned back you would have a couple of hours' ride to the mine, and it's very likely that one of the men will have come for the horses and taken them away. I don't think we could get on any faster if we landed."

Carteret glanced at the matted undergrowth and tangles of fallen trees and made a sign of assent. Primeval forest is always difficult to scramble through, and in many parts of the Pacific Slope a couple of leagues a day is as far as a strong man can expect to travel in the bush. The beach offered no promise of an easier route, for it was strewn with big boulders, among which a mass of drift-wood had washed up, and the ends of broken branches that projected from this did not look inviting.

"I've no intention of trying," Carteret assured him. "You'll have to push on somehow, and I'm only sorry that I can't help you, but I've already done a good deal more than was wise the last day or two."

Sydney laughed and pulled off his jacket.

"I'll manage, but I'll have to strip to it. I'm afraid this thing's rather wet, but it will help to shed some of the water if you put it over your shoulders."

Then, disregarding Carteret's objections, he picked up the paddle and drove the canoe steadily into the chilly rush of wind that met him in the face as she slid out round the point. After that he fought stubbornly for every fathom while the craft lurched on the little splashing seas. The cold rain was streaming down his face, but he was scarcely conscious of it as with labored breath and straining muscles he swung the paddle, while the ache in his wrist, which he had already felt, became almost unendurable, and his swollen fingers stiffened painfully.

Now and then, as a furious whirl of wind came down over the pines and whipped a white track across the water, he swung the craft round to it, and with a tense effort held her where she was until it fell away again. Every two or three minutes the top of a short, frothy sea splashed into her, until at length he was kneeling an inch deep in water, and at each stroke of the paddle a shower of spray flew up from her streaming bows. There was no respite at all. To slacken paddling for a moment would involve being blown back to leeward and the throwing away of several grimly-won yards.

He was aware that he could not hold out much longer, and he would have abandoned the struggle had he been alone or known what to do with his companion. It was, however, unthinkable that they should turn back now, and he realized that it would be dangerous to expose the elder man to a night in the rain-

swept woods, even if he could have lighted a fire, about which he was very dubious. Besides, he remembered that Clare had asked him to take especial care of her father. How far they still were from Vosper's he did not know, but he was sure that he was making less than two miles an hour, while both of his knees were bleeding, and one hand was horribly raw where the paddle-haft had galled it. On one side of him the dark branches were tossing and wailing dolefully, but the other shore of the lake was hidden in sliding haze, and there was only a narrow stretch of white-flecked, rain-beaten water in front of him. His sight seemed a little dimmer than it had been, a salty moisture trickled into his parched mouth, and he could feel his heart beating painfully. It was by sheer force of will that he held himself to his task. Finally Carteret spoke to him.

"You can't keep this up. We'll have to land," he said. "We might make some kind of shelter with a few fir branches behind a boulder."

"If we did we should probably have to stay there until morning," replied Sydney. "I think I can hold out for another mile or two, and Vosper's ranch can't be very much farther."

It was, however, an hour before he caught sight of it, and he was cramped and gasping and aching all over when a little opening grew wider among the trees. It cost him a determined effort to reach it, and the blood was trickling from his hands and staining his wet trousers about the knees when he stepped out among the boulders. Then a man, who came out of a little log house close by, called to him.

"Go right in and I'll haul the canoe up," he said. "You're looking quite played out, and I guess that's not astonishing if you've brought her down the lake against this wind. I'll be along in a minute or two and get you some supper."

CHAPTER XI

AN EMBARRASSING SITUATION

THE rancher found his drenched guests a change of clothes and set supper before them, and when they had made an excellent meal, he went out and left them alone, explaining that he had something to do in his barn. It was still raining heavily, and the deluge that thrashed the tossing pines pattered upon the shingled roof, but it was very warm and snug in the little log-walled room where the two men sat smoking beside the stove. Carteret still looked rather weary and gray in face, but Sydney lay in a hide chair in the languid state of physical content which those who have borne a long day of physical exertion in inclement weather now and then experience.

His joints and muscles ached, but it was very pleasant to feel the warmth once more glowing in his veins, and to settle his weary body in a comfortable pose; and he had also the subconscious sense of satisfaction that not infrequently follows the strain of tense effort in which the worn-out flesh is held subservient to the unyielding will. How he had succeeded in reaching the ranch he did not know, but he was quite sure that several times during the journey the thing had seemed impossible, and he had felt that the paddle must slip from his slackening grasp after another stroke or two. Then he had remem-

bered that Clare Carteret had commended her father to his care, and he had forced his failing powers to renewed effort. He found that he could not get her out of his mind as he lay in the comfortable chair, with his pipe in his hand, while the twinkle in the open front of the stove became brighter as the little room grew shadowy. He could picture her standing on the veranda looking at him very graciously, as she had done when she had asked a favor of him, and he thrilled at the recollection of it.

He admitted that it was, perhaps, foolish of him to think of her at all, as he was now an impecunious rancher and there were impassable barriers between them. That, of course, was plain; but he believed that he possessed both prudence and self-control, and as long as he exercised these commendable qualities there was, he felt, no reason why he should not continue to act as her attendant. There was also a vein of unreasoning optimism in him. He felt that it was not impossible that something might happen to remove at least some of the barriers by and by, and half-consciously he had already connected that vague expectation with the Long Divide mine. After all, he held a good deal of stock in it, and he had been wondering how he could judiciously question Carteret in regard to it. In the meanwhile the stove snapped cheerfully, and into the log-walled room there crept the music of the little angry waves surging among the boulders and the wail of the wind among the rain-thrashed pines.

At length Carteret turned to him.

"How are your hands?" he asked.

Sydney, who was conscious that one of them was still bleeding, laughed.

"They're a little sore, sir, but they'll be all right to-morrow. It seems to be blowing stronger. We were lucky to get in when we did."

Carteret nodded.

"There's no doubt of that," he said. "I'm not as vigorous as I was a few years ago, and I realized it to-day. If we had been forced to lie out in that rain all night it would probably have left its mark on me, and you have laid me under an obligation. Once or twice, however, I thought that you were beaten."

"I believe I was rather near it, sir," Sydney admitted.

Carteret made a little gesture.

"Well, you held on, and that counts for a good deal. It was fortunate I decided on taking you with me to the mine."

Sydney saw his opportunity for asking a question.

"I know nothing about mining, but I was interested in looking about me when we were up there. The Long Divide is one of your properties?"

"I have a pretty big share in it."

"There seemed to be a good deal of ore lying about. Do you get much silver out of it?"

"Are you thinking of buying Long Divide stock?" Carteret interrogated dryly.

Sydney laughed.

"I'm afraid that's scarcely likely, sir. At present I'm very glad to earn the money you are paying me, and I don't suppose there'll be much left over when I have put in the winter on my ranch. Perhaps I shouldn't have asked the question."

His companion looked at him with a twinkle in his eyes.

"After all, there's no reason why you shouldn't have done it. As a matter of fact, we have so far succeeded in extracting very little silver from that ore; so little indeed that it has scarcely paid for reduction, which is one reason why there is so much of it lying about. There are people who wonder why we took the trouble to keep the concern on its feet,

and it wasn't done without some opposition and a good deal of trouble."

"You felt that you might strike ore that was richer in silver some day?" suggested Sydney, who decided that he must hazard a rebuff.

Carteret, he fancied, looked at him rather intently, but he answered.

"No," he said, "I expected to make something out of the copper. It cost a good deal to separate, and a rather large proportion was wasted, while for a long while copper was unfortunately cheap. Of late, however, the price has been steadily rising, and there have been economies made in the process of reduction."

Sydney was now keenly interested. It seemed possible that the shares he held might become marketable, and if they reached their face value he would, after all, be placed in command of capital enough to give him a start in life, with some chance of success, in a country where he understood a good many men who had begun with practically nothing had achieved a desirable competence. He was not a covetous man, and indeed hitherto had never suspected that he possessed the commercial instinct, but he was sanguine, and there had suddenly opened up alluring possibilities. He felt that he might, perhaps, by some means wipe out the disgrace which had fallen on his name and rehabilitate himself, which would—and this was the nucleus of the whole idea—bring Clare Carteret within his reach. In the meanwhile he ventured one more question.

"Then the mine may pay you well, after all?"

Carteret favored him with a swift and penetrating glance, and then smiled.

"I could answer that more clearly in three or four months. In the meanwhile, the Long Divide is generally regarded as one of my few failures."

Sydney, who was possessed of some common sense,

realized that he had gone at least as far as was advisable, and changing the subject he talked about other matters until their host came in. He had, however, an unpleasant suspicion that his persistence had excited his companion's curiosity, which belief was, as it happened, perfectly justified. As a matter of fact, Carteret, who was a singularly shrewd and observant man, had already been curious about him for some little while.

They retired early, and after breakfast the next morning set out in Vosper's carriage for a settlement within reach of the railroad. Two days later they arrived at Carteret's ranch without misadventure; and on the one that followed Sydney was despatched to a ranch in the bush to bring back a team and wagon which Carteret had decided to hire. It was a long walk and though he started soon after sunrise it was early in the evening when he drove slowly down the slope to a creek that crossed the trail about a league from home. A gang of trail-cutters then engaged in throwing a rude log bridge across the creek had camped close by the water's edge, and as Sydney approached it a couple of shots rang out in quick succession. The sound reverberated startlingly through the stillness of the woods, and, while the echoes still rolled along the ridge above, there was a hoarse shout of satisfaction and a burst of laughter. Sydney let the startled team go, and had some trouble in pulling them up in the midst of a somewhat striking scene a minute or two later.

A narrow clear space stretched between the forest and the stream, and upon one side of it several thin, white tents lay prone. They were rent and tattered, and the smashed poles stuck out from under them. Round about were scattered smashed cooking utensils, burst-open bags and fragments of clothing, while the space in front of one was strewn with flour.

Three or four bare-armed men in blue duck were standing about amid the wreckage, and there was grim satisfaction in their brown faces, while one of them held a Marlin rifle in his hand. Opposite them a big red and white steer lay lifeless just clear of the trail, with one horn driven into the soil. Sydney fancied that he understood the situation as he glanced at the unfortunate beast, for he had heard that the bush-bred cattle apparently delight in wrecking a trail-cutter's or a prospector's tent and destroying everything within it.

In another moment or two a stout, perspiring man, who had evidently been running, broke out from the bush farther along the trail, and, turning partly around, shouted apparently to some companions behind him, for he assured them that the trouble was not serious and that they could come right along. Sydney recognized him as Simcoe, one of Carteret's guests, and he was not greatly astonished to see Haines, Clare and Lucy Brattan emerge from the shadow. Then he glanced round again, and became aware that the trail-cutters were looking at him in a somewhat curious manner.

"I guess you can see what the blame beast has done," said the man with the rifle. "If you can't, you had better get down and look at it."

"It's quite evident," replied Sydney. "It seems to have made a considerable mess of your camp."

"The second time," added one of the others. "Guess you wouldn't expect any one to let that kind of thing go on?"

"I should certainly feel rather sore about it if I were in your place," Sydney answered. "Hadn't you a fence?"

Another of the men raked a couple of split rails out of the underbrush.

"The rest of it's lying round," he growled. "That

beast just gamboled over fences when it couldn't hook them down." Then he grew red with wrath. "Expect us to send to Vancouver for wire to keep the buster out?"

"No," said Sydney, "it wouldn't seem to be necessary now, anyway. I'm sorry you have had the trouble, but, as far as I can see, it has nothing to do with me."

He was gathering up the reins when the first speaker swung up his hand.

"Nothing to do with you! You're the man who bought Steve Jackson's place, aren't you?"

Sydney admitted it, and the other laughed harshly.

"Well," he said, "I guess you ought to recognize your own property."

Then the unpleasant truth dawned on Sydney, and he forgot that he had another audience as well as the trail-cutters. He had been told by Brodie that if he needed money to carry him through the winter he must sell a steer or two at one of the mining camps as soon as the natural feed in the bush withered off. Now he supposed the premature killing of the beast would prove more or less disastrous.

"You mean that the beast is mine?" he asked.

"Anyway, it's carrying Steve Jackson's brand."

Sydney sat silent a moment or two. He was not sure that he had any redress, and another glance at the wrecked camp convinced him that considering everything he could not altogether blame the men. Disturbed as he was, he admitted that if he had twice come back tired from work to find his tent and spare garments ripped to pieces, and his provisions scattered or destroyed, he would, in all probability, have done what they did.

"Well," he said at length, "if it has Jackson's brand on it, no doubt it's mine; and I needn't tell you that I feel as vexed about the thing as you seem to.

You see, it's evidently going to cost me a good many dollars that I can badly spare. I'm not sure that I would have acted differently in your place, but that doesn't make it any pleasanter, and, as you have shot the beast, the question is what I am to do about it?"

The hostility in the men's attitude became less evident, and one or two of them whispered together. Then the one who held the rifle moved a pace or two forward.

"If you had tried to put up a bluff on us we'd have fixed the thing quite differently," he said. "As you didn't, we're open to be reasonable. First thing you want to do is to get that steer opened up and take its hide off."

Sydney looked at him with a little rueful smile.

"Unfortunately, I've only a moderate-sized pocket-knife to do it with. But suppose I got the beast cut up, I certainly couldn't eat it all. What comes next?"

There was a burst of good-humored laughter, and Clare, who had watched him closely during the last minute or two, was pleased with the attitude he had adopted. There was no doubt that he had won the men over by admitting that there was a good deal to be said for their point of view, though she was reasonably sure that he would have had trouble with them had he taken the opposite way. At the same time she fancied that he had not been actuated by diplomacy, but by an inherent and probably subconscious sense of equity, which made it easy for him to do what was fitting. Then the trail-cutter answered him.

"Seeing what kind of man you are, it's kind of lucky you fell in with our crowd," he said; and Clare realized that Sydney was right in striking the whimsical note again when he looked at the speaker dubiously.

"I can't help a fancy that I'd have been more fortunate if I hadn't," he replied.

"Well," said the other, "we haven't seen a deer or grouse for a fortnight, and salt pork is dear."

He looked round at the others, who murmured their assent.

"That's why," he added, "we'll take as much of that meat off you at usual store price as we figure we can get through with, though you'll have to haul us out the salt we'll want."

"Thank you," said Sydney. "What's to be done with the rest?"

"If I were you, I'd start right away and haul it in to the settlement. They've a crowd of the track-grading boys boarding there just now, and I guess they'd buy up most of it."

Sydney glanced at the steer, and realized that there was a good deal to be done first. He had not the faintest notion how to set about dismembering it.

"As a favor, will you show me how to cut it up?"

"Get right down," said one of the others. "We'll fix it somehow if we have to take the ax and cross-cut."

Sydney swung himself down from the wagon with a strong inward shrinking from the task. He was fastidious in some respects, and it was one from which he revolted, but there was a vein of tenacity in him, and since this unpleasant thing had fallen to him he was going through with it. Then he was a little disconcerted to notice that the party from the ranch had drawn nearer in the meanwhile and that two of them were laughing. He supposed that to anybody less interested than he was the thing might appear amusing.

"Rough on you," sympathized the burly Simcoe. "First time you have turned butcher?"

"You're not going to do anything quite so awful as to cut that beast up?" inquired Miss Brattan.

"I'm afraid I am," replied Sydney. "There's ap-

parently no help for it." Then he turned to Clare. "Do you think I could borrow the team until to-morrow, Miss Carteret? I want to drive in to the railroad."

"Of course," said Clare. "Still, it's a long way. You will have to travel all night."

"It won't hurt me, and I think the horses can stand it. I brought them along easily."

Clare turned away, but before Sydney joined the trail-cutters Haines overtook him and drew him aside into the bush.

"Now," he said, "you have given us some good fishing the last week or two, and I want to say that we appreciate the trouble you have taken. The job you have in hand is not the kind of thing any one not used to it would revel in, and it seems to me it would be possible to get some of these trail-cutters to put it through and take the meat in to the settlement with the team. I would be glad to attend to that part of the matter if you'll leave it to me."

Sydney looked at him steadily.

"No, thanks," he said. "There are one or two reasons why I can't do that. Is this altogether your own suggestion?"

Haines hesitated.

"No," he admitted, "the thing certainly occurred to me, but, as a matter of fact, Miss Carteret sent me."

"I suspected it. Tell her I'm sorry. She will probably understand why her suggestion is impossible."

Haines made a sign of assent.

"After all," he confessed, "I had an idea that you'd look at it in that way when I came along."

Then he turned and went back to the others, while Sydney strode across to where the trail-cutters stood awaiting him.

CHAPTER XII

LUCY'S RESCUE

IT was a hot and drowsy afternoon, and the salmon were coming up the river. Sydney lay upon a shelf of rock above a whirling pool. There was another ledge some yards beneath him lapped by a rush of foam, and Clare stood poised on it with a long fish-spear in her hand, while Lucy Brattan sat a little apart from her. In front of them the crystal water—for it was not tinged with green like most of the larger rivers in that country—swung round and round the rock-walled basin; and tufts of delicate, black-stemmed fern and trailing vines filled the crannies of the crags upon the farther side. From the crest of the latter the dark pines rolled upward, solemn and very still. The air was heavy with the fragrance the hot sun drew out from them, and the many-toned song of the river made all the deep hollow musical.

Sydney had his pipe in his hand, and he was quite content to lie still in a strip of cool shadow, for he had risen with the sun that morning to mow timothy, and as he was not accustomed to that occupation, it had left him aching all over. In addition to this, the deep roar of water was curiously soothing; and as his share in the fishing consisted in taking the salmon off the spear barbs and knocking them on the head, he was just as pleased that the two girls had as yet met with very indifferent success.

They struck the one note of human interest in that scene of rugged desolation, but their presence formed no inharmonious intrusion, for rock and river and towering pines grandly held their own. Indeed, the girls' pale draperies, though they caught the light and held it, offered no harsh contrast to the many-colored soft tinting of gleaming stream and stone; and their figures alone stood out from the surroundings by mere force of line. Lucy Brattan had found herself a seat with her back to the slope of rock, but Clare stood straight and tall, lightly balanced, with the slender haft of the spear running high above her shoulder, and there was grace in every curve of her contour. Now and then the dusky back of a fish rose like a shadow out of the crystal depths of the pool, and vanished in a sudden silver gleam at the tail of the rapid that poured into it. After that there was generally a bright flash amidst the froth, a splash like that made by the dropping of a heavy stone, and another of the strange nomads whose life-story no man as yet altogether knows had forced the arduous passage of the rapid.

Once upon a time they ascended the rivers in countless hosts, filling them so that in every shallow some were crowded ashore, but of late their numbers have rapidly diminished. All the way up from the Pacific they had been harried and preyed upon, for the big fish-traps on the American shore, and the boat nets by the mouth of the Fraser, had thinned the steadily-advancing battalions. Then the wandering Siwash, the fish eagles, and even the bears, had taken further toll of them. Now though they still shone as they leaped and plunged and struggled through the rush of foam, the brightness of their silvery luster was rapidly fading, and they were worn and scarred with the long and arduous journey. They had, eating nothing the while so far as man's knowledge goes, churned

the turbid green flood through the dyked Fraser meadows, faced its full power in tremendous, sound-filled cañons, crossed crystal lakes, flashed through still deeps in the shadow of primeval forest, bored up countless rapids, and leaped spray-veiled falls; and, though the battalions had shrunk to companies and sections, they were still pushing on.

Suddenly Clare leaned forward, and the long spear haft dipped. For just a second it and the girl seemed stricken into absolute, unyielding stillness; and then her figure, growing suddenly supple, swayed, and the slender shaft, bending sharply, drove outward away from her, ripping through the surface of the pool. Sydney swung himself down to the ledge beside her, where he stood quietly intent, until in another moment or two she moved backward quickly with a swing of her body, and he fell upon the writhing fish that banged across the shelf of rock. There was a cleverly-fashioned bone barb driven deep into its flesh, but still attached by a foot of sinew lanyard to the socket on the spear. He killed the fish, took out the barb, and replaced it carefully upon its socket. Then he rose, and held up the fish, a steelhead salmon of some twelve pounds.

"The third in an hour!" he said.

Clare laughed.

"A Siwash would have had a dozen. I wonder how many Haines and Simcoe have? I think Florence had a couple when we left that pool. Perhaps it might be as well if you went down and asked them to come up here."

Lucy Brattan objected to this.

"No," she said. "Simcoe's probably lying smoking in the shadow, and Haines will no doubt be talking to Florence. They were arguing about those Washington fish-traps half the morning, and she insisted on reading him all the *Colonist* had to say about them.

It seemed to me a particularly silly thing to talk about; but if they like that better than helping us, it would be a pity not to let them stay there. Anyway, I don't want Jardine to bring them until I catch a fish. There are two or three swimming about nice and slowly yonder."

She pointed to a rather slacker part of the eddy, which was cut off from the ledge where they stood by a perpendicular wall of rock. There were, however, a few big fragments and boulders at the foot of it, with about three feet of water beyond them. Sydney looked dubious.

"It's rather an awkward place to get at it, and I can't very well help you, as there's room for only one at a time," he said.

"I'm sure I could reach it, and I could stand on that last stone," the girl persisted.

"I think you're better here."

"And I don't. Why should Clare catch three fish when I haven't any?"

"You haven't been trying," Clare broke in.

"Well," returned Lucy, "when I want to try, you won't let me. Anyway, I mean to."

She flashed a glance of smiling defiance at Sydney; but he had already gone as far as he felt warranted, and he climbed back to his seat, while the girl clambered somewhat awkwardly over the stones until she reached the last of them, upon which she took up her station. First, however, she took off her hat and laid it at her feet.

"I believe it has been frightening them all the time. Fish, of course, have no sense," she said.

Sydney leaned back in his seat among the rocks above and refilled his pipe. He did not think Miss Brattan would succeed in spearing a fish, and he was gazing at the forest some minutes later when he heard a splash, and a cry from Clare. Then he sprang sud-

denly to his feet, and looking down saw Lucy clutching at the stone, waist-deep in the river. The bottom, as he knew, shelved rapidly, and the eddy was running fast, though it was slacker there than elsewhere. He realized that it would cost him some little time to reach the girl by the way she had taken. Running a few paces along the crest of the rock he sprang out from it, and fortunately alighted in deeper water than that in which she was floundering. There was not the least hazard as long as she held fast to the rock, though it was evident that the girl did not recognize this.

In another moment she clutched him wildly, and, as that seemed the easiest way out of it, he picked her up, and essayed to climb out upon the stones with her in his arms. Though she was slight in form it was, perhaps, not astonishing that he signally failed and splashed back into the water. After this he endeavored to lift her until she could get her feet upon the stones, with no greater success. When he stood still again, gasping and red in face, Clare called to him.

"Put her down, and then climb out and help her up!"

Lucy clung to him more closely.

"If you let me go," she cried, "I'll drown!"

Sydney tightened the arm he had laid around her reassuringly, and as he did so he had a disconcerting fancy that Clare was watching them with an almost undesirable attention. He also wished that Miss Brattan had not clutched him round the neck; but he could not drop her against her wishes, and the water was certainly rather deep. He stood still for a moment or two, waist-deep, feeling rather foolish and wondering what he should do, until he looked back at Clare. She was certainly not alarmed, and he fancied that there was a suggestion of impatience in her eyes. Then he suddenly decided to try to wade to

the ledge where she was standing. He managed it, though Miss Brattan's skirt washed about him embarrassingly, and he nearly lost his footing once or twice. When he reached the rock Clare seized the girl's shoulder.

"Now," she said, "if you will only make an effort you can get up here quite easily!"

The effort was successful, though Sydney made most of it, and in another moment or so Lucy stood dripping upon the ledge. She looked down ruefully at her bedraggled attire.

"I don't think it will ever set quite right again—and I felt sure I was going to be drowned." She turned impulsively to Sydney. "I believe I would have been if you hadn't come for me."

Sydney felt that Clare's eyes were upon him, and he laughed.

"No," he said, "I really don't think you need have been afraid of that."

Then Lucy suddenly looked round again.

"Oh," she cried, "I must have knocked my hat in, and it's quite the nicest one I have. It's yonder in the pool. Do you think you could get it, Mr. Jardine?"

Sydney was by no means sure of it, but he scrambled back over the broken fragments and boulders until he reached the end of them, where he saw that the hat was still some distance beyond his reach. It had drifted with the eddy and caught in a little projection at the foot of the rock, which just there dropped almost straight into deeper water. While he considered how he could get a little nearer it he heard Clare speak to her companion, and her voice had a note of impatience in it.

"If you're wise you will go home at once and walk as quickly as you can," she said.

"I'm not going without my hat," answered Lucy, decisively, and leaning over the ledge above she smiled

at Sydney. "I'm sure Mr. Jardine will bring it to me."

Then Clare called to him.

"If you really mean to get it, hadn't you better take the spear?"

"It's too far to reach," replied Sydney; and catching at a crevice he swung himself forward a foot or two and found hold for his toes in another crack.

After that he had no very great difficulty in working cautiously forward two or three yards, and eventually found handhold on a little projection above him and a scanty support for his feet on a slight outward slope. The hat was very close to him now, but it lay beneath his feet, and he could not bend down to pick it up without falling forward into the water. The slope, which afforded him a precarious foothold, projected rather farther in another yard or so, and he was considering how he could reach the spot when there was a crack above him, and a shower of fragments fell upon him as he leaned back against the rock. The little projecting stone he had been holding on to had broken off in his grasp.

Then for the first time he felt uneasy. The crest of the rock was several yards above him, with the slope almost vertical, and he fancied that there was six feet of water at his feet. That would not have troubled him in itself, but the boulders over which he had clambered lay up-stream, and not far away the river poured tumultuously down a long white rapid. He had not the least desire to try whether he could swim down it, and as he stood with his shoulders braced against the rock he remembered having seen the branches ground off a great drifting pine in such a passage.

Then, though he could not see her, he realized that Clare was standing on the rock above him, for her voice sounded very close and a little hoarse.

"Can you climb up?" she called.

"No," replied Sydney, "I'm afraid not. I think I can hold on."

"Then don't move," directed the girl; "we'll bring the others."

After that he heard a rustle of draperies and a crackle of undergrowth, which suggested that she was running down the bank; and deciding that it might be possible to make the ascent with the aid of a fish-spear, if it were firmly held by two men above, he contrived to maintain his position for a while. By and by, however, the strain on his feet and knees became almost intolerable, and realizing that he must slip off in a minute or two, he cast another swift glance at the surface of the pool. He was almost sure that he could not reach the boulders nearest him. The current was too strong for that, but it swept outward with the swirl of an eddy not far away, and it seemed to him that the swing of the latter should carry him well over toward the opposite bank. In that case he might, by swimming vigorously, escape being drawn into the outflow at the tail of the pool.

He made up his mind to try it; but it is difficult to make a long, flat plunge without sufficient room for one's feet, and instead of springing forward he fell in a heap. He came up in a second, and swinging his left arm out and forward, with his face under, gained the swing of the eddy and swept with it across the pool. Then he reached a slacker flow, and after a few more vigorous strokes crawled out on the opposite bank. The thing had been positively easy, though he realized that it might have had a very different result had he once drifted into the foaming rush at the top of the rapid a few yards lower down.

He had, however, still to face an awkward scramble up a precipitous hillside, and when he reached the top of it he decided that as he was wet through he

would go straight to his ranch through the bush. The others could get across by a canoe lower down the river when they wished, and he supposed they would do so before very long, as he remembered that Miss Brattan was probably as wet as he was. It never occurred to him that they might feel anxious about his safety.

In the meanwhile Haines, smashing through the undergrowth at the fastest pace he could make, reached the crest of the rock above the pool, and after a swift glance below turned and called to Clare, who was running toward him, with Simcoe gasping in front of her and Lucy and another young woman a little behind.

"Is this the place?" he cried.

He understood Clare to say that it was, and his voice was a little anxious as he answered her.

"Then," he said, "the man isn't here."

They came up with him, hot and breathless, and looked down with consternation at the whirling pool. There was certainly no sign of Sydney, nor, though this was a much less important matter, was there any sign of Lucy's hat. She looked at Clare, and her face grew white.

"Oh," she begged, "call him, one of you! He must be somewhere about."

Haines called several times, but there was no answer, and in the silence that followed the last cry Lucy spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"He's not in the pool. I can see all over it."

She looked at Clare, and fancied that she saw tension in her eyes.

"No," Simcoe broke in sharply, "of course not. The rapid's the only thing I'm troubling about."

He looked at Haines, and when they strode away together Lucy sat down limply. She presented a somewhat woful appearance, for she was bareheaded

and bedraggled, while her wet skirt was rent from scrambling through the undergrowth. There was also anxiety and confusion in her face.

"They are only taking trouble for nothing. He has just swum across and gone quietly home."

"I suppose you feel sure of that?" said Clare. "As a rule, it's not difficult to believe what one wishes."

"Of course," answered Lucy, desperately. "He must have done it."

"Then why don't you go back and change your things, instead of shivering here?"

Lucy did not answer this. For one thing, she noticed the curious hardness in her companion's tone.

"It wasn't my fault," she protested wofully. "How could I tell that wretched stone would break away with him?"

"How can you say that? He told you not to go."

Clare's voice was singularly unsympathetic and she looked at her companion sternly.

"The stone you stood on was quite big enough. How did you manage to fall in so easily?" She paused a moment in a very significant manner. "I never fancied you had the courage."

Lucy flushed almost crimson.

"Oh," she cried, "I didn't! How dare you suggest it? The water was too deep. It was quite an accident. I was moving to get nearer a fish, and my foot slipped."

"Then why didn't you climb out on the stones? You could have done that easily, instead of making him carry you. It wasn't—decent."

A smile crept into Lucy's eyes.

"He could have put me down if he had really wanted to. Besides, I'm very light. He would certainly have fallen over if he had tried to carry you."

Clare said nothing further, and some minutes later the two men appeared again.

"It seems certain that he has swum across and gone home through the bush," said Haines. "As supper will be ready soon, and Miss Brattan should change at once, perhaps we had better follow."

It was evident to both the girls that these were not his only reasons for wishing to reach the ranch as soon as possible, and they set out together, walking a good deal faster than there was any very apparent reason for. Five minutes later Simcoe looked at Haines.

"We seem to have forgotten the fish," he said.

"That's evident," returned his companion, shortly. "Anyway, I'm not going back for them."

In due time they approached the ranch, and as they crossed the clearing they came upon Sydney clad in dry clothes and unconcernedly splitting stovewood. This afforded most of them considerable relief, but Lucy, watching Clare closely, saw a faint tinge of color creep into her cheek and an ominous look in her eyes. She stopped a moment when they reached Sydney.

"You evidently managed to get out," she said coldly.

"Yes," he replied; "I hadn't any very great difficulty."

Clare's brows grew straighter.

"Did you succeed in saving Miss Brattan's hat?"

"No," answered Sydney, "I'm afraid I didn't. In fact, I'm sorry I didn't even remember it."

"That," said Clare, dryly, "is one consolation."

She walked on into the house, taking Lucy and her other companion with her, and after a few words with Sydney the men followed, leaving him somewhat puzzled by the girl's manner. Then he laughed softly as he recalled a suggestion Haines had once offered him in explanation of a somewhat similar case. It was very pleasant to feel that Clare had been anxious about him.

In the meanwhile the latter walked into Lucy's room.

"Is there anything I can lend you?" she asked.

"No, thanks," said Lucy. "Do you think you were wise in making it clear to that man that you were vexed with him, Clare?"

"I was—a little. He should have stayed and told us. Why shouldn't I make it clear to him?"

Lucy smiled suggestively.

"Well," she said, "he is really comparatively intelligent, and he might begin to wonder why you should be vexed." Then she looked thoughtful. "After all, I never thanked him. I think I had better do it. No doubt he would expect it."

"You naturally preferred to wait until you had put on a more becoming skirt. That pale blue one you are looking at is the smartest you have."

Clare turned and went out, while Lucy took up the skirt with a rather curious smile.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DIRECTORS' POLICY

SYDNEY was mowing fern among the fir-stumps which encircled the Carteret ranch one hot evening, when he found it necessary to stop and whet his scythe. He was rather glad of this, for he had been mowing for several hours and was becoming conscious of an unpleasant stiffness in his arms and back. When the sharp ringing of the stone on steel was lost again in the stillness of the woods, he leaned against a stump, looking about him contemplatively.

It was necessary work he had been doing, for he had discovered that while it is difficult to chop a clearing out of the primeval bush, it is only by persistent effort that one can prevent the forest from creeping back again. The breast-high fern steals out from the shadow and clings safe from the ploughshare among the stumps; the willows root in the hollows; and where the ground lies unbroken there spring up fresh hosts of sapling pines. The small rancher must fight an endless battle to keep what he has won; and the pity of it is that unless new mines are opened up, or sawmills built near his holding, the fruits of his labors are usually gathered by other men after he is gone. He sows with patient toil for a great harvest to be reaped in days to come, which is the part he has always played, for the foundations of western prosperity have been laid secure by unknown and forgotten men.

All round the clearing the solemn firs lifted their black spires high against the wonderful green transparency which usually follows the blaze of sunset in that country, and piles of acrid-scented fern and underbrush lay among the stumps just touched by the dew. It was very still, but now and then an odd burst of laughter or the murmur of voices came up faintly from the house, where a light already blinked in Carteret's window.

Sydney found it all very pleasant as, leaning against the stump, he took out his pipe. He liked the sweet smell of the firs, and even the pungent odor of the fern. He was comfortably tired, and no more than that; and he recognized that he liked this tranquil, healthful life, though he admitted the improbability of his ever growing rich at it. He had work that he could do, and it was taking a stronger hold of him, while he was quite aware that his abilities were not of a kind that would secure him much emolument in England.

On the other hand, he had a trouble which he felt must be resolutely grappled with, for his thoughts would center upon Clare Carteret. Do what he would, he could not drive out of his mind a regret that the opportunity for seeking her favor, which he had once neglected, was no longer his; and at times he almost abandoned the attempt. Deep down in him there was, however, a half-formed feeling that, after all, by some means which he could not forecast, the difficulties that now hemmed him in might be banished.

By and by he looked up in astonishment as a man moved toward him across the clearing. There was no doubt that the newcomer was Brodie, and though he was glad to see the man he wondered, with some uneasiness, what he could want with him.

"What has brought you here?" he asked.

Brodie laughed as he sat down.

"Well," he said, "that's more than I can tell you yet. I once cut a trail to the Long Divide mine, and Carteret wrote me a few days ago asking if I'd come over and see him as he had something he wanted me to do. Just now it seems he's busy with a man from the cities, and as Miss Carteret told me you were mowing, I figured I'd come along and talk to you until he was ready."

"Then you don't know what he wants you for?"

Brodie took a newspaper out of his pocket, and after opening it handed it to his companion.

"I've a kind of notion it may have something to do with this," he said. "It should interest you, anyway, if there's light enough to see it."

Sydney contrived to read the lines the rancher indicated, and he started as he did so, for they announced that a reward of one hundred dollars would be paid to any one who could furnish indisputable evidence of the death of a young Englishman supposed to have been killed in a landslide on a specified date near the Morland settlement. Then he laid down the paper and looked at Brodie, who looked at him.

"If they're not satisfied with the Indian's story, it seems to me there's only one proof that would convince them," said the rancher. "They've got to find that young Englishman's body." Then he laughed softly. "It's a sure thing it can't be done."

Sydney looked thoughtful.

"I wish I knew exactly why they want to find him."

"Then you haven't a notion?"

"Not the faintest. I know why I want to keep hidden; but that is quite another matter."

"Well," observed Brodie, with an air of reflection, "if you're sure of that, it's something. I've struck folks who didn't seem able to figure out why they wanted to do what they did. It might be a question of money."

"No," answered Sydney; "at least, I don't see how it could be."

There was silence for a minute or two after this, and then Brodie spoke again.

"Now," he said, "you pulled me up that day the landslide came down on us, and in any way I can help you can come right on me. I'm asking you no questions, but I've got this to say—if Carteret's a relative of yours, and mixed up somehow with your affairs, you've taken hold of a contract that's too big for you in staying here. Somehow and sometime you're going to give yourself away. The point to consider is—will that make worse trouble for both of you?"

"You may be right," said Sydney, who had been conscious of a growing uneasiness since the man appeared. "In any case, it can't hurt—Carteret—though it may mean that I shall have to give up this ranch, which I don't want to do. That's all I can tell you in the meanwhile."

Brodie made a little gesture which suggested that it was sufficient for him; and as the light was getting too dim for mowing, Sydney laid by his scythe and sat down among the fern near his companion. Then they talked about ranching, while darkness slowly settled down upon the clearing.

In the meanwhile Carteret sat in his room with a Vancouver man who served on the directorate of the Long Divide.

"If you mean to put your project through we shall have trouble at the next stockholders' meeting," said the latter. "So far as I can discover, quite a few of the smaller holders have had about enough of carrying on the mine; and instead of voting for an increase of capital they'll probably take the first opportunity for getting part of their money back. You had the directors solid with you when there were objections made in other years; but Brough's kicking strongly

now, and two of us retire. I suppose you are quite convinced that it would be worth while to go on with the course suggested?"

Carteret smiled.

"I'm as sure of that, Nettleton, as I am of anything connected with mining—the one point I'd like to be a little more certain of is that it can be done. It will be absolutely necessary to raise the extra capital if we are to work the copper in the new lode, and, as you say, we'll have Brough and a good many of the small holders dead against the scheme. If the man was straight that wouldn't count for quite so much."

They looked at each other, and Nettleton made a sign of comprehension.

"I believe it's a fact that he's too thick with the Crestwick Lode people; and they're taking hold of all the odd properties they can pick up cheap. Seems to me you had better tell me right out what you suspect."

"Suspect," said Carteret, dryly, "is scarcely the right word. This is what I'm counting on. When I lay my scheme for raising further capital before the meeting, the small holders will object. As I said, what they want is to get back their money, and considering everything I can't blame them. When they have made a vigorous protest Brough will spring upon us an offer from the Crestwick people to take the whole thing over at, for example, sixty or seventy cents on the dollar's worth of issued stock."

Nettleton sat still a moment or two.

"Well," he assented, "it's quite possible. The only point is that Brough is holding a good deal of stock. He won't want to throw away those thirty or forty cents on every dollar."

"If Brough brings the proposition forward, it will be because the Crestwick people have made it worth his while. It's significant that news of what we're doing at Long Divide has somehow leaked out, though

it doesn't seem to have given holders courage or to have created any demand for the stock. Now, if I can get the money, I can practically count on making the mine pay—though I'm willing to admit that my assurances on this subject may not have much weight with the objectors against the Brough-Crestwick offer."

"Then it is simply a question of voting power. The first thing is to settle, as far as we can, whom we'll have for and against us. In that respect it's fortunate that very little stock has changed hands."

Carteret had a list of the stockholders' names, and he read them over, dividing them roughly into opposite camps. Then Nettleton looked at him significantly.

"It's going to be a mighty near thing," he said. "If we divide the men we can't be sure of between you and Brough, and give him the two new directors, it seems very possible that he'll beat us, though, of course, nobody can tell beforehand how a meeting of this kind will go. It seems to me that the English proxies you had solid in other years would count for a good deal now."

"That is a matter I have been troubled about," Carteret admitted. "I don't know, and so far my inquiries have had no result, who owns that English stock. As I believe I told you, the man in whose name it stands has disappeared, and there's every reason to believe him dead."

"Then hadn't you better find out his heirs-at-law and write them for their proxies?"

"The difficulty is that you can't dispose of a man's property until you have definite proof of his decease, or can get legal authority for assuming it."

"It's a pity," said Nettleton. "So far as I can see, if we are to head Brough and the Crestwick people off we must have those proxies."

"I'm doing what I can to get them. There are

two men I want to talk to with that end in view. If you'll wait a few minutes, I'll have them brought in."

He walked out of the room, and coming back a few minutes later lighted a cigar and sat down again. Soon after he had done so Sydney appeared, and Carteret turned to him.

"I wonder if you have any acquaintance with English legal formalities, Jardine?" he asked abruptly.

"I'm afraid I haven't, sir."

"In that case there's probably no use in asking if you have any idea as to what is necessary to be done before you can obtain authority to assume the death of a man in a case where it is impossible to obtain actual proof of it?"

The lamp was lighted, and, though there was a shade on it, Sydney was unpleasantly conscious that he had started at the question.

"I understand that it occasionally entails a good deal of trouble and expense."

"Thank you," said Carteret. "Will you tell Brodie to come in?"

Sydney did so, and the two were standing close together when Carteret spoke to Brodie.

"If you're not too busy, there's a little matter I'd like you to undertake. I want you to go back to where the landslide came down the range and see if you can find the remains of that young Englishman. You can charge me reasonable expenses and two dollars and a half a day; and put one or two of the local ranchers on, if it seems necessary."

Brodie hazarded a swift glance at his companion, but Carteret noticed it.

"I should have mentioned that I intend sending Jardine along with you," he added.

Sydney fancied that Brodie was disconcerted, which did not seem in the least astonishing; but, as it happened, he was standing in the shadow. The other

two men, however, sat where the lamplight fell full upon them, and he was quick to notice the sudden gleam of interest in Carteret's eyes, which suggested that the rancher's embarrassment had not escaped him. It faded in an instant and his face became quietly impassive.

"I'd sooner let the thing alone," said Brodie.

"Why?"

Carteret's voice was steady and level, but Sydney's uneasiness increased.

"You're going to waste your money in looking for young Carteret?"

"It seems to me that is my affair."

Brodie hesitated.

"Well," he admitted, "I guess it is, in one way, but it goes against me to take your money for nothing. There's quite a few thousand tons of rock and dirt and smashed-up trees lying round where the landslide came along. You couldn't sift it over if you dug for a couple of years."

"You feel that there is very little probability of our finding him?"

"That," said Brodie decidedly, "is a sure thing."

Carteret leaned forward a trifle.

"You have some particular reason for believing it?"

Brodie did not answer for a moment or two, and it seemed to Sydney that the little room was oppressively quiet. Neither of the older men moved at all, but Sydney felt his heart beat as he watched their impassive faces, until his companion spoke again.

"Well," he replied, "I surely feel that we're going to waste our time."

Carteret appeared to reflect.

"It's quite possible," he said at length. "Anyway, I mean to have that digging done, and I'd rather send you than any one else. After the way you cut that trail for us at Long Divide I feel that you'll do the

thing thoroughly." Then he turned suddenly to Sydney. "Have you any objections to going with him?"

It was an embarrassing question. As a matter of fact, Sydney had very strong objections indeed. He was conscious of the greatest repugnance to taking Carteret's money; but there was, so far as he could see, no way of escape from the unpleasant situation that was not likely to excite the elder man's suspicions. In fact, he fancied that Carteret was more or less suspicious already.

"I feel very much as Brodie appears to," he answered. "Still, if you particularly wish it, I'm willing to go."

Carteret nodded curtly.

"Then," he said, "you can start to-morrow and search for a couple of weeks. After that you'll come down here again, and we'll consider whether it's worth while going any further."

They went out immediately afterward, and Nettleton looked at his companion curiously.

"I've no doubt it struck you that they were almost suggestively unwilling to go?"

"It certainly did," Carteret admitted in his dryest tone. "Still, in one respect, I was not altogether astonished. Whichever way I turn in connection with that English stock I'm brought up by a dead wall. Anyway, I must do everything possible to get those proxies."

Then they discussed other aspects of the question while Brodie walked back with Sydney to the latter's ranch, where he was to stay the night. On reaching it Sydney lighted the lamp, and they sat a while smoking silently in the little, almost empty, log-walled room.

"That's a smart man," said Brodie at length. "You can't tell what he's thinking, but I guess he can look all round a thing and size it up in a way that wouldn't

be possible to you or me. In fact, I had a notion I was blamed near giving the whole show away." Then he made a little expressive gesture. "It's you he means to find, not Hilton. I sure don't like taking his money."

The blood crept into Sydney's face.

"You don't suppose the thing's any more pleasant to me?"

Brodie made a sign of resignation.

"Well," he concluded, "if Carteret didn't send us he'd send somebody else; and the point is that the other man might find Hilton. What would you do then?"

"I don't know," confessed Sydney. "It's naturally a matter that has been worrying me. He would probably have letters or something on him that would identify him."

His companion broke into a short, dry laugh.

"We'll get out of here at sunup before Carteret's about. I don't want that man asking me any more questions; but I'm expecting trouble when we come back again."

CHAPTER XIV

AN UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH

BRODIE, who hired another man for the sake of appearances, spent a week with Sydney upon the lower slopes of the range. The latter found it a very unpleasant week indeed, for he was troubled by a haunting fear that, although the thing seemed improbable, they might, after all, chance upon Hilton's remains. He did not wish to do so, for this would complicate the situation horribly, even if it did not lead to actual exposure, but the man had been a pleasant companion, and he realized that it was his clear duty to make some attempt at finding him.

Brodie, however, seemed to feel no scruples of that kind, for he proceeded to dig in what were evidently the most unlikely places; and the man they hired made no suggestions but contented himself with carrying out the instructions given him. Sydney blamed himself now and then for acquiescing in his companion's intentions; but there was no doubt that he was vastly relieved when they returned to their tent at sunset each evening after a day of wholly wasted labor.

The week had ended when they stood one afternoon surveying the foot of the great mass of débris which had stopped in a more level hollow after the rest had swept over it. Among the soil and gravel were big shattered rocks and scored boulders, and Brodie glanced at the latter reflectively.

"We have to make some show for our money anyway; and if we put in a stick or two of giant-powder we might start a hundred tons of that dirt down-hill," he said. "It doesn't strike me as likely that Hilton's anywhere round here."

Sydney noticed that the foot of the mass lay upon the verge of a steeper descent, and it seemed very probable to him that the shock of the blasting charge might have the result his companion anticipated. They had brought several sticks of giant-powder with them, and the man they hired had brought a drill. He was then at work farther up the hollow, and Brodie smiled as the clink of his shovel reached them faintly.

"He's earning his money and heaving a lot of dirt about, digging just where I told him to," he grinned. "It's quite hard to find a thing when you look in the wrong place."

He handed Sydney the drill and bade him hold it against one of the stones and twist it every time he brought the hammer down upon the head of it. He added that, although in a general way two men engaged in drilling took it turn about, he would stick to the hammer, as the novice usually succeeded in hitting his companion's hands. The stone was singularly hard, and they worked for a couple of hours before Brodie was satisfied that they had sunk the holes deep enough, after which he carefully rammed into each of them a stick of yellow material with a powerful detonator embedded in it. Then he cut the three cord-like fuses to a precisely equal length, and, after trailing them straight out and lighting them, hastily retired.

Two or three minutes later there was a yellow flash, a spurting of filmy smoke, and a curious sharp crash, followed by a deafening roar; and Sydney, snugly ensconced behind a fir, saw a cloud of flying stones hurtle into the forest and the front of the mass break up. It rushed down the hillside, and when the sound

died away in a long diminuendo far down among the trees, Sydney, clambering back, saw that the result of the shock was considerably greater than anything he had expected, for a forty- or fifty-yard strip of the débris had been started bodily on another journey. He was troubled by misgivings as he approached the spot where it had lain, and it was with a half-guilty sense of relief that he realized that there was still no sign of Hilton.

The remainder of the mass lying farther back from the edge of the declivity had, however, not moved; and Brodie, who said that to fire another shot would only make a hole in it, decided to desist for supper. They prepared the meal, and were lying outside their tent smoking, an hour later, when a man came scrambling toward them up the track of the slide. He seemed very hot and breathless, and his expression suggested that he was also somewhat out of temper. Stopping in front of the tent he fixed his eyes sternly on Brodie.

"I've come along to see what you mean by turning big rocks loose on my holding," he informed the latter. "Aren't there enough natural slides in these blamed ranges without your making more of them?"

"We didn't figure on quite so much dirt getting away, and that's a fact," Brodie admitted civilly. "Anyway, you needn't kick about a little slide or two. You ought to be getting used to them by now."

The man did not seem appeased by this.

"Oh," he cried, "I guess you would be quite content if you saw half your clearing buried fifty feet deep and your crop on the rest of it torn right up."

"I wouldn't," said Brodie. "If I figured it was going to happen often I'd shift my ranch."

The man looked about him with evident curiosity.

"What are you doing up here, anyway?"

"Looking for the body of that young Englishman."

The stranger laughed contemptuously.

"Then I guess you're wasting quite a lot of time. That man was never caught up by the slide."

"What makes you so convinced of it?" Sydney asked with a start.

The stranger swept his hand round and pointed to the hollow where the débris lay.

"I had a long talk with the Indian, and he was sure that the man was quite a way ahead of the slide. Look at the place. It's most level just here, and the dirt wouldn't be moving very quick, while the front of it isn't wide. Now if that man had run straight on it might have caught him up, but what would he want to run straight for when all he had to do was to turn off for the bush? Would you run straight if you knew a mighty big slide was coming along behind you?"

"I wouldn't. Still, if it didn't catch the man up, what's become of him?"

"That," answered the stranger dryly, "is more than I can tell, but I've heard of men who found it handy to let other folks think them dead."

Brodie flashed a quick glance at Sydney, whose face, however, remained expressionless.

"Well," he said, "we were sent up here to look for him, and we have got to do it, but I guess we won't turn any more rocks loose on you. Now you've come all this way up, won't you sit down and have a smoke?"

"I won't," said the other. "I haven't got through. What I came up here for was to ask who's going to pay for my wagon?"

"Something hurt it?"

"I was driving home when I heard a shot. The first slide had crossed my trail, and anyway it was pretty bad. That's why I couldn't get the team to hustle when I saw the rocks hopping down the hill; and a big one came bang, smash, slap into the middle

of the wagon. It kind of crumpled up, but the team got loose somehow. I haven't found them yet."

"Where were you?" Brodie asked softly.

"That don't count," drawled the stranger. "Think I'm going to sit and watch it when a rock as big as a locomotive is heading straight for me? Anyway, the wagon's all broke up, and it was most as smart as new when I bought it."

Brodie turned to Sydney.

"That wagon was new about eight years ago."

Then Sydney broke in.

"If you haven't had supper, sit down and we'll get you some. We'll come along and look at the wagon sometime to-morrow."

The stranger consented, and when at length he went away Sydney looked at Brodie.

"This puts an end to the thing," he said. "That man's objections make a legitimate excuse, and it seems just possible that Hilton got away, after all. In any case, I'm going back to Carteret's to-morrow."

A little dry smile flickered into Brodie's eyes.

"Well, it's a sure thing I don't know whether he did or not. That being so, I've had enough of this."

They set out the next morning, taking Carteret a bill for a new wagon, which he made no difficulty about. He said very little when he heard their story, and soon afterward Sydney went back to his ranch, where he had a good deal to do. He was sitting outside it, in the stillness of the evening, with his pipe in his hand, when Clare walked out of the bush and sat down on a log not far away. Sydney was a little astonished to see her, but he had discovered already that when she wished to do a thing she generally did it without unduly deferring to anybody else's opinions. It was quite evident that she wished to talk to him, which brought him a thrill of satisfaction.

"You needn't put away your pipe," she said. "You

went up to search for—the remains of Sydney Carteret —and were unsuccessful?"

"We couldn't find any trace of them," Sydney admitted; and added, with a smile, "However, we succeeded in destroying a rancher's wagon."

Clare had rather straight brows, but they seemed to grow straighter when she was displeased, and as they did so then Sydney decided that she considered his flippancy unbecoming.

"I wonder whether one might ask if you are greatly interested in the fate of Sydney Carteret?" he ventured. "As I believe I mentioned, I heard a little about it, one way or another."

The girl sat silent, looking away from him for a moment or two, and then answered slowly, as though trying to arrange her thoughts for her own benefit.

"Yes, I am interested. There were one or two matters with which you are probably unacquainted that make the thing unusually tragic. I think I am really more than a little sorry for the man."

Sydney set his lips tight upon his pipe. The situation was certainly a very curious one. It seemed he had himself for a rival, for he now admitted that it had come to this. What made it more difficult was the fact that she had never, to her knowledge, seen Sydney Carteret, and he surmised that, being moved to compassion by his death and painful story, she probably thought of him with a tenderness which might not have resulted from an acquaintance with him. That he, the actual man, should be pitted against, and perhaps unfavorably contrasted with, an imaginary being, the mere creation of a girl's romantic fancy, was, it seemed to him, sufficient cause for feeling exasperated.

"Your father seems singularly anxious to make sure that he is dead," he said.

"Yes, I have noticed that," Clare assented thoughtfully.

"But do you know of any reason for it? Could Carteret's death have been—a relief—to him in any way?"

He saw the girl's slight start.

"It is curious that I have thought of that," she admitted. "There were one or two things which seemed to bear the idea out, but I dismissed it in spite of them. I am, at least, certain he was genuinely sorry when he heard of the accident."

"But regret for the man's untimely fate would hardly in itself account for his very evident eagerness to secure some definite proof of it."

This was a point which Sydney had thought over earnestly of late, and it became clear that it had also occupied his companion's attention.

"No," she acquiesced, "it doesn't. I have once or twice wondered why he seems so interested. It may be due to some business reason, but I don't know. He doesn't explain these things—to me."

There was a slight but subtle change in her voice as she said the last words, and Sydney fancied that she either was regretting that she had to some extent taken him into her confidence, or, perhaps, desired to suggest that if Carteret thought fit to keep such matters from his daughter's knowledge it was scarcely becoming for his hired man to investigate them. It occurred to him that if the latter supposition were correct she had been rather tardy in adopting this attitude; but, after all, he did not expect her to be consistent. As he pondered over the question a smile crept into his eyes, and it was not astonishing that Clare noticed it. She had, however, the courage to admit that she understood its meaning.

"Well," she said, "I have, perhaps, been a little injudicious in mentioning the thing; but, after all, as you told me, you knew Sydney Carteret."

"I should like to think you had another reason. In

case I'm wrong in this, I may as well assure you that I can now and then respect a confidence."

Clare looked at him with steady eyes.

"I don't mind confessing that I feel sure of that."

Then she changed the subject abruptly.

"You still like ranching?"

"Yes," was Sydney's answer. "I like it about as well as anything else I've done. On the other hand, there isn't very much in the admission, because I can't remember having done anything that you could call really worth while."

"Have you ever asked yourself what it leads to?"

"So far as I can see, it doesn't lead to anything in particular. A healthy life, perhaps, and—one would like to think—a certain degree of contentment and tranquillity. Of course," and he laughed, "there's a wider view. Some day, no doubt, these little holes we're chopping in the forest will meet and join, and our oat-fields, pastures and orchards will stretch, climbing to the cultivation limit, right across the province."

Clare nodded.

"Oh," she responded, "we have our visions, and they'll most certainly materialize by and by; but, after all, that's not quite to the purpose. All that is wanted in the men who will prove them realities is hard muscle and the capacity for persistent toil."

"It seems to me that is a good deal," said Sydney, reflectively.

The girl made a little sign of impatience.

"Many men possess them and nothing else. It's their part to do the pioneering work; but aren't you to some extent wasting your time here? Have you no more advanced capacities?"

This was a question that Sydney had asked himself rather frequently of late, but he was far from sure that he could answer it affirmatively.

"If one must be precise, I'm almost afraid I haven't.

Anyway, I don't think I should make a success if I plunged into the struggle for money on the markets in the cities. I don't know whether one's relatives are usually prejudiced in one's favor, and, perhaps, as a general rule, they're not, but there's no doubt that mine didn't consider me capable of taking any part in the business they were engaged in, which was banking. In fact, they showed an unflattering anxiety to keep me out of it."

"A banking business!"

Clare's astonishment was evident, while Sydney realized with a start that his unguardedness might have led to a most undesirable revelation.

"Yes," he replied with a smile which cost him an effort. "That shouldn't seem so very unusual. There are naturally a good many people connected with banking in the old country. Sydney Carteret's folks were, for instance."

Clare seemed puzzled.

"It is, at least, curious that several of the facts you have mentioned about yourself—and your characteristics—remind me of what I have heard of Sydney Carteret."

"Which, no doubt, explains the interest you have taken in me?" Sydney suggested, boldly.

"I must admit the interest, if only because it warrants what I wish to say. Suppose an opportunity for testing your talents—and you really may have some that you don't suspect—in a wider field were offered you, what would you do?"

"I would, at least, think over it," said Sydney.

Clare rose.

"Then we'll regard that as a promise; and now I think I must be getting back to the ranch." She made a sign of protest. "No, I don't want you to come with me."

She turned away and left him in a very thoughtful

mood, and, as it happened, he saw very little of her for the next few days.

An evening or two later, however, Haines, who had just come back from a visit to the cities, walked into his dwelling. Sydney was somewhat astonished at this, but he drew him out a chair, and then sat down again, looking at him inquiringly. Haines handed him his cigar-case, but said nothing for a few moments, during which he glanced suggestively round the little room. Its walls were formed of uncovered logs, and a small and very rusty stove occupied the middle of it. Between the latter and the window stood a rude table, and the two chairs, which were roughly seated with deer hide. It contained nothing else except a few indurated ware vessels on a shelf; and the lamplight which streamed into another room revealed the fact that there was nothing at all in this one except a hay-filled bunk fixed against one wall. Haines allowed it to become evident that he noticed the Spartan simplicity of his companion's domestic arrangements.

"I'm going to talk quite straight, Jardine, and if you take it up the wrong way, I can't help it," he said. "All this is rather different from what you have been accustomed to."

"I dare say that remark would apply to a good many men similarly situated on the other side of the frontier —in the bush round Puget Sound, for instance," Sydney retorted.

"To some extent," admitted Haines. "Still, in a general way, when our men have had the education and training that has been given you they strike for something higher."

"Do you know what particular kind of education and training I have had?" Sydney asked bluntly.

"I'm taking certain things for granted. They're so plain that we needn't discuss them. Now, I want

to ask you what will you have over after a year's work here?"

"Not enough to keep me on the place for another twelve months unless I can help it out."

"We'll extend the time to, say, six years later. How are you going to stand then?"

"That," replied Sydney, with a smile, "is rather more than I can tell you. I may own another half-dozen head of stock, and, perhaps, a horse or two; and in all probability I'll have added a few more acres to the clearing. There's very little probability of my possessing a balance in the bank."

"Can you see any possibility of making the place self-supporting—that is, capable of keeping you in any kind of comfort—without an outlay of two or three thousand dollars?"

"It's a very small one," admitted Sydney.

"Then," said Haines, "the next question is, Do you consider it worth while to go on with the thing when I can put something more promising before you?" He raised his hand. "Let me get through. I can give you a start in the land business in Tacoma, and if you lived half as abstemiously as you do here you wouldn't have much difficulty in saving quite a share of your first year's salary."

Sydney was a little astonished, but he smiled.

"Have you any reason for believing that my services would be worth anything at all in a business about which I know absolutely nothing?"

"In the present case it's not so much a question of purely technical knowledge—that can generally be picked up—as of character and temperament. I'll admit right away that I believe your services would be worth something to us. Would you like me to be more precise?"

Sydney made no answer for a minute or two. To begin with, the life he led was rapidly taking a stronger

hold on him; and to continue, if he stayed on his ranch he would, it seemed, have Clare Carteret's society most of every summer. He admitted that the latter was a very desirable thing. On the other hand, it was clear that he might toil on for years without drawing any nearer to her; but again he did not think he could equalize their stations by means of a land-agency clerk's salary. He was sanguine enough to feel that perhaps some opportunity of making progress would arise by and by, and, indeed, what Carteret had suggested about the Long Divide seemed to promise it; but he realized that if the opportunity was to be of any benefit to him it must be in connection with something in the bush—a mining venture, or the building of a dam or sawmill. He had no liking for the fierce scramble in the cities.

"No," he said at length, slowly. "I appreciate your intentions, but as I shall stay on here it wouldn't be worth while."

"That's your last word?"

"It is," replied Sydney; and then he looked up at Haines sharply. "It's rather a coincidence that you should have made this suggestion so soon after Miss Carteret talked to me in a very similar strain."

His companion smiled.

"As a matter of fact, it isn't a coincidence at all. It's the natural sequence."

There was silence for a minute or two, and then Sydney broke it.

"Looking at it from one point of view only, it's not consoling to feel that Miss Carteret is perfectly willing to get rid of me."

"She isn't," Haines assured him with a laugh. "I can say this because you have too much sense to misunderstand the thing. She never meant to let you go altogether. If you had come to us it's more than likely that you would have been transferred to Van-

couver by and by; and if you had got a foothold there you would to some extent have had Carteret behind you. I must add that you're not an exception. Miss Carteret has made it clear in my own case and Simcoe's that she doesn't like her friends to get beyond her control."

Sydney gazed at him while an angry warmth crept into his face, but a twinkle once more appeared in his companion's eyes.

"You must take that the right way. You haven't quite grasped Miss Carteret's capabilities yet. She likes to rule—it's part of her nature—but there's no reason for believing she desires any of us to make love to her. I may add that her father's the one man she has a difficulty with. Carteret's quiet, but you might as well try to influence a rock."

He rose.

"I believe I've made the thing clear to you, and I'm sorry you won't come to us."

"Thanks," said Sydney, quietly; "I've decided to stay on here."

Then Haines went out, and Sydney sat still for a considerable time before he clambered into his straw-filled bunk.

CHAPTER XV

CARTERET STANDS FAST

SOON after Sydney came back from the range Carteret went down to Vancouver for a few days, and he was sitting in his inner office in a big stone building one morning when a clerk opened the door.

"Mr. Brough," he announced.

"Ah," said Carteret, "I have been expecting him. Have you sent across to the post-office yet? I heard the Pacific express come in a while ago."

The clerk quite understood the connection between this question and the visit of the man then waiting in the outer office. He had some weeks earlier written, by his employer's instructions, to an English lawyer respecting Sydney Carteret's shares in the Long Divide mine.

"Stainer has just come back," he said. "They had sorted out the English mail, but there was nothing for us."

"Then bring Brough in."

A man of middle age was shown into the room. He was red-faced and somewhat portly, and his manner was almost aggressively abrupt. He came in fussily, and when he sat down and looked at Carteret the clerk fancied that the interview would prove a somewhat momentous one. He would have liked to stay and listen to what they had to say, for Brough,

who sat on the Long Divide directorate, was known as a domineering man; but as that was out of the question he went out, wondering whether the latter would succeed in ruffling his employer's composure. There was a marked contrast between the men he left together, for the one was bustling and forcible, even in his gestures, while Carteret was usually characterized by an unemotional serenity, which became more evident when he had business matters of any importance to handle. Just then his lined face was rather quieter than usual.

"The manager's report you sent me struck me as rather vague," said Brough. "Its general tone was presumably meant to be optimistic, but there were singularly few facts—nothing that one could pin anybody down to." He looked at Carteret in a manner that was almost offensive. "Of course, that kind of thing is advisable now and then. One can shelter behind its indefiniteness afterward."

Carteret smiled.

"It's generally difficult to be precise in a mining forecast. In any case, the report was only for the directors, and I should be glad to give you or the others any further information in my possession."

"To cut it short, you believe the new lode will come up to your man's carefully-hinted-at expectations?"

"The company's man," Carteret corrected him. "I fully expect it will exceed them."

"Do you mind mentioning what you base that opinion on?"

"Twenty-seven years' experience of British Columbian mining."

Brough's expression was not conciliatory.

"The trouble is that the Long Divide stockholders have had eight or nine years of it; and as they've only twice been paid a few cents on the dollar, and the stock has been practically unmarketable most of the

time, it's about enough for them. What I want you to realize is that the report you sent me won't have the least influence if it's laid before them at the next meeting."

"I quite expect some opposition."

"Then you still mean to go on with the new stock flotation scheme?"

"Certainly."

Brough made a gesture of indignant protest.

"You'll never force it on them; and if you did, investors wouldn't look at it. The very name of Long Divide is offensive."

"It will sound rather different when we get a few hundred tons from the new lode down to the smelter."

Brough raised his hand.

"I assure you it won't go down. The stockholders have been told that kind of thing too often."

Carteret looked at him sharply.

"If the issue of the new stock is authorized I'll take up a large part of it."

He said it as if he meant it, for he wished his colleague to believe him, though he knew that this might have one of two opposite results. It would either disarm Brough's opposition and induce him to support the scheme, or render him more determined to discredit and pull down the company, with the object of turning it over to a concern with which he was apparently in league. Carteret decided that it was necessary to ascertain which course he would adopt.

"It won't be authorized—you can count on that," said Brough. "That's why I want you to drop the thing and save everybody trouble. Long Divide's dead, and should have been decently buried several years ago. It would have been if it hadn't been for you."

Carteret smiled, and answered with open candor.

"I believe you are correct. In fact, the mine has

become quite a personal hobby. I certainly kept it going."

"At the stockholders' expense."

"They could hardly have sold their stock, and they would have got practically nothing if they had liquidated the concern."

"They might now, if inspection proved that there was anything in that report. Some of the big concerns might take us over at, say, half or two-thirds of the face value of the stock."

"Some?" queried Carteret, dryly. "I wonder whether you mean—one—in particular?"

Brough's face darkened.

"I'll tell you what I do mean, and that's what brought me here. You found it mighty hard work to tide over the last few meetings, and you had me and the rest behind you then. Now you'll have me against you, and the two new men will be in sympathy with the objectors. As you can't carry the meeting, wouldn't it be better to give the idea up?"

Carteret smiled.

"At the moment I'm not prepared to admit that I can't carry it, although, as you suggest, it's quite possible. You're going to move some reconstruction or liquidation proposal?"

"I am," asserted Brough. "I could have sprung it on you, but it seemed more decent to tell you beforehand and save you trouble. The fact is, I sympathize with you to some extent. You have run Long Divide just as you liked for eight or nine years, and no doubt it's rough on you to have to let go, but I want you to face the situation and do the thing pleasantly. It would make it considerably easier for me. You see, we're certainly not going to carry on the concern."

"Thank you," said Carteret. "I'm afraid I can suggest no compromise. I suppose you don't feel inclined to make one either?"

"I don't. It's out of the question."

"Then," said Carteret, "we'll have to leave it to the meeting."

Brough went out, and Carteret sat still, somewhat grim in face, until his clerk came in. The latter, who had been with him since the Long Divide mine was started, and was to some extent a privileged person, looked at him inquiringly. Carteret smiled.

"Mr. Brough has brought me an ultimatum, Hatton," he said. "It seems that he and his supporters are going to overrule my policy."

"Do you think he has taken them altogether into his confidence, sir?"

"He didn't enlighten me upon that point, but it scarcely seems likely. Mr. Brough is inclined to be dramatic, and I imagine he's contemplating something of the nature of a *coup d'état*. Whether he can bring it off is another matter, and I naturally expect to put up a fight. As it's one in which those English proxies would count for a good deal, it's a pity we'll have to wait three or four days for the next mail."

The clerk went out, and Carteret lighted a cigar and leaned back in his chair, disregarding the papers in front of him for some while. He was certainly troubled, for it seemed possible that Brough might be able to carry out his intentions, in which case it would be singularly unpleasant to see the mine sacrificed on the eve of a belated success.

A few days afterward the English mail brought him the expected letter, and the lawyer said there was no difficulty in fixing upon Sydney Carteret's heirs. The law as regards the succession to property was, he pointed out, quite clear. On the other hand, he anticipated some trouble in obtaining authority to assume the death of Sydney Carteret, for he feared that the information with which he had been supplied

hardly amounted to definite proof, and only a short period had elapsed since his disappearance. Proceedings would, however, be instituted by the next of kin, though he anticipated considerable delay in getting a decision, and in the meanwhile there were various formalities which Carteret was requested to comply with in Canada.

The latter set about the task at once, and also wrote the English heirs, requesting their support in case they obtained possession of the shares, before he went back to his ranch. On the evening after he arrived there he sat out on the veranda talking with Mrs. Graham about the matter. She was a woman of quick intelligence, and could, as he was quite aware, respect a confidence.

"There are two or three points that naturally occur to one," she remarked. "It scarcely seems reasonable to suppose that the stockholders would be willing to sacrifice their property if there is actually valuable ore in the mine."

"It certainly doesn't," responded Carteret. "The trouble, however, is that while I believe the ore is there it will cost a good deal of money to prove the fact."

"But wouldn't your assurance have some weight with them?"

Carteret smiled sourly.

"It had once, but unfortunately I've made other optimistic forecasts at previous meetings which failed to appear quite warranted in the face of subsequent events. That," he added, "is not an altogether unusual occurrence in connection with mining."

Mrs. Graham made it clear that she understood the situation.

"It seems you have—shall I say induced them—to hold on against their judgment hitherto, and now when they have secured a leader they have revolted."

"You might call it driven, bluffed or bullied—I believe that is how some of them regard it," Carteret answered dryly. "I don't mind admitting that I was determined to keep the mine going at any cost."

"But this man Brough—I think you said he held a good deal of stock—is he quite incredulous about the ore?"

"I don't think he is."

"Then why should he be so anxious to wreck his own property?"

"Well," replied Carteret, "my explanation is that Brough has a certain animus against me, and, what is rather more to the purpose, that he has been bought up. News about the ore has leaked out, and our powerful rivals have, I believe, quietly decided to get hold of Long Divide."

"After all, it wouldn't be a very serious thing if you were beaten."

"It certainly wouldn't break me," admitted Carteret. "That, however, is not quite the point. I suppose"—and he smiled whimsically—"that what I'm most afraid of is the injury to my self-esteem. You see, I've been regarded as one of the leaders of provincial mining for a good many years, and now it would be rather hard to retire, beaten by my own shareholders and discredited. Besides that, the desire to make the Long Divide a success has become almost a mania with me—once I could accomplish that I'd clear out gladly—and I've a very natural objection to letting Brough and my rivals pocket what will presently be Clare's money."

He broke off for a moment, and his face grew harder as he went on again.

"As a matter of fact," he added, "I'm not beaten yet, and in all probability the whole thing will turn upon the proxy votes of that English stock. When two opposed bodies are practically equal a very small rein-

forcement is apt to turn the scale. That's why I'm sending two other men up to dig for Sydney Carteret's remains."

"It's rather strange that Brodie and Jardine came back so soon."

Carteret rose.

"There are several other points about the thing that are strange in the extreme; but I'll go along and talk to Simcoe. I must try to get the matter off my mind a while. It's worrying me."

He went into the house, and left her sitting on the veranda. By and by Sydney walked across the clearing, and she watched him with a close attention she could not quite account for, though she vaguely connected it with what Carteret had said. Then turning with a start she saw Lucy Brattan standing beside her.

"Yes," she said, "he's really a good-looking man, and there's an air of mystery about him that appeals to one. A good many missing heirs and young men of that kind seem to come out here from the old country. I believe they found one the other day who'd married a Siwash and lived in a rancherie. It must have been a trying thing for his people."

Jean Graham smiled.

"One wouldn't anticipate such a proceeding in the case of Jardine."

"Oh, no," agreed Lucy. "One couldn't imagine his doing anything like that." Then she added, "I suppose you really don't know anything about him?"

"No," replied Mrs. Graham, "practically nothing. He bought the little ranch, and Carteret employed him as he did his predecessor. It's merely because he differs in several ways from the other man that we have treated him as we have done, though"—and she looked at Lucy rather sharply—"I was not altogether sure that it was wise. Even now I can't guarantee him."

"I won't admit that you have been very injudicious in Jardine's case. For one thing, Clare gets on well with him, and she certainly wouldn't have done so if there were anything seriously wrong with the man's character. She would recognize it instinctively—and shrink from him. It's a curious thing to say, but I'm convinced of it."

"Well," reflected her companion, "I'm tempted to believe that you are right. I have felt much the same thing about Clare myself. There are a few people—not necessarily prudish people—who possess that faculty. Still, it may not be so much of a safeguard in all cases, and, after all, it's not a very great deal to rely on."

Lucy met her inquiring gaze.

"I believe I'm still less prudish than Clare, but I generally trust my impressions. They're rather clear in this instance. That man has done nothing that he can have any particular reason to be ashamed of."

"I wonder why you have taken the trouble to assure me of it?"

"Oh," laughed Lucy, "I don't know. It certainly wasn't to convince myself."

Then she moved away, and Jean Graham sat still, wondering what she had meant, or whether she had meant anything at all in particular.

It was the next day when Lucy, who, for some reason which she did not explain, had remained behind the others, summoned Sydney to take her down the lake after them in the smaller canoe. She was very becomingly dressed, and Sydney felt a certain pleasure in watching her as she sat facing him in the stern of the canoe while he pulled leisurely across the shining water. There was no doubt that Lucy was seductively pretty. She said nothing for some time, and in the case of his employer's guests Sydney generally waited until he was spoken to.

"You and that rancher came back from the range quite soon," she observed at length.

There was a hint of annoyance in Sydney's face, but he decided that he had no tangible cause for resentment.

"It was rather hard work," he explained. "Besides, the task naturally wasn't a pleasant one in various ways. I believe we were almost afraid of being successful."

"Yes," assented Lucy, "one could understand that. Did Carteret inform you that he had sent up two other men to try where you had failed?"

It was evident that this was news to Sydney, and it seemed to have a disconcerting effect on him.

"He did not. May I point out that you seem to have an extraordinary way of acquiring information?"

Lucy laughed good-naturedly.

"I suppose that is correct, but in this case I happened to hear of it accidentally. You probably don't know why Carteret should seem so very determined to discover his relative's remains?"

"No," answered Sydney, unguardedly. "I very much wish I did."

He realized that he had made an injudicious admission as soon as he had spoken, and felt the more sure of it because his companion displayed no particular sign of interest. He was beginning to understand Lucy Brattan.

"How can it affect you?" she asked indifferently.

"I really don't know how it could," declared Sydney, who realized that this must appear very unconvincing, though it was perfectly truthful. "Still, I am a little curious about the thing."

Lucy asked him nothing further for a while, and gazed meditatively down the lake. There was not a breath of wind astir, and the water lay still in the sunglare, shining like a mirror. No sound rose from the

shadowy forest that crept close down to it, and the great hills that ran high up toward the cloudless blue of the sky seemed to have put off their savage ruggedness. That afternoon they towered above the twinkling water in majestic serenity.

"It is really very beautiful," she said. "There must be a good deal that is pleasant in the bush rancher's lot. If you ever regained your kingdom would you still live up here?"

"My kingdom's gone for good," answered Sydney, with a rueful laugh. "It vanished suddenly and utterly."

"Then you must have had one?"

Sydney was once more disgusted with himself. She had tricked him into similar admissions several times already by unexpected questions. Still, it was difficult to be angry with her.

"Well," he explained, "I'm not sure that I would have bought Jackson's ranch if I had come out two or three years ago, for instance."

"In the meanwhile you haven't answered the original question."

"Then, if you insist on the information, and it's of any value to you, if I were a good deal more prosperous than there's any reasonable probability of my being I think I should stay up here."

"It's very nice," smiled Lucy, "in the summer."

Sydney fancied that there was something significant in the way she looked at him, and he was conscious of a momentary thrill of anger as he remembered that it was only in the summer that Clare Carteret visited the ranch. He had, however, no intention of admitting that his companion's suggestion was warranted.

"I've no means of knowing what the rest of the year is like," he pointed out.

"Well," said Lucy, "one associates you with summer, and you have quite an effective background—a

blue lake, frothing rivers, and big black firs. What's more, you fit into it rather well, though I could think of quite a few young men who wouldn't. Most of them would be too forcibly up-to-date. Don't you think you're fortunate?"

A faint warmth crept into Sydney's face. He was beginning to love the wild and lonely land for itself, but he wondered how much truth there was in what Lucy Brattan said, and whether what she had stated applied to Clare Carteret. If the latter would ever think of the wide, blue lake, the flashing river or the solemn, pine-scented bush when she was in the cities, it would be something to feel that he would figure in the pleasant memories.

"Wouldn't that be a difficult admission for a generally modest man?" he asked.

Lucy laughed, but she looked away again across the lake. Impecunious bush rancher as he apparently was, she knew that when she looked back on that summer it would be because of him. The clean virility of the man appealed to her. She liked his whimsical manner and his ingenuousness, which was only made more apparent by the reticence on certain points which she realized he had some difficulty in imposing upon himself. He was not smart, as smartness was considered in the cities, but there was about him a vague something which made that smartness tawdry by contrast. She was a somewhat resolute young woman, and might perhaps have hinted delicately what she thought of him, but she would not do it uselessly, and it was already clear that he would never think of her.

In the meanwhile Sydney was dipping the oars leisurely, and by and by, as they crept past the foot of a crag that dropped sheer to the water, a trail of blue smoke drifted out across the lake.

"Won't you pull a little faster?" she said. "They're getting supper."

CHAPTER XVI

A CLASH OF WILL

A FRESH breeze that set the dark firs wailing was sweeping through the bush when one evening Clare and Sydney came to the foot of a short spur of hillside which fell sheer to the lake. There was a creek on the other side of it where the rest of the party were presumably already fishing, for the two had become detached from their companions some time earlier. This, however, had come about accidentally, for while they were scrambling along a strip of steep hillside Sydney had run forward to help Miss Brattan, who appeared to have some difficulty in crossing a rather awkward spot. He was carrying a couple of rods and a fishing-basket at the time, and the latter flew open when he stumbled in his haste. Having occasion to look into it some time later, he discovered that Clare's cast-book was missing.

Clare was far from pleased when he informed her of this. It had occurred to her that Lucy could have crossed the difficult place unassisted if she had wished, and that even if this had not been possible she could have summoned Simcoe, who was only a few paces in front of her. She also felt that Sydney had been a little too officious. Why either fact should displease her she was not prepared to admit, since it was part of Sydney's duty to look after her father's guests, but, nevertheless, she was conscious of a certain irritation.

In any case, she sent him back to look for the book, while she searched in the more immediate neighborhood, and the others, being in front of them and not noticing that they had stopped, went on. Some time had elapsed before Sydney recovered it, and Clare then decided to follow her companions by a shorter but more difficult route on a lower level. Thus it was that there was nobody else about when the two reached the foot of the little spur.

The face of it, which was steep, and broken by ledges of rock, was partly covered by tall firs, but a fire had swept that strip of forest some time ago, and they were stripped of every smaller branch and spray. Most of them indeed were no more than half-charred and blackened columns, and a number had fallen here and there. It seemed to Sydney that they had fallen very recently, and he was aware that a brulée or burned forest is not a desirable place to traverse when a fresh breeze is blowing. What was more to the purpose, several of the trees on the rocky slope leaned outward in a manner which suggested that a very little thing would bring them down. The thin top of one broke off as he gazed at them, and dissolved into a cloud of charcoal dust when it struck the ground. After this subsided he noticed that two or three of the fallen logs lay across the narrow and somewhat precarious trail.

"I'm afraid you can't get up, Miss Carteret," he said.

"Why?" Clare asked sharply.

"For one thing, it would be a rather awkward scramble over those trees, and it seems to me that more of the rest might come down at any moment. There's a fresh breeze."

It is probable that on an ordinary occasion Clare would have agreed with him, but she was a little ruffled in temper just then.

"It's perfectly safe," she contradicted.

Sydney made a gesture of dissent.

"It would be very much wiser to go back."

"That," said Clare, coldly, "is a matter of opinion. It's not far to the creek across the ridge, and it would take half an hour to go round by the other trail."

Sydney admitted this, but he still persisted, knowing the danger in crossing a wind-swept brulée.

"It is the only prudent thing to do."

Clare's brows seemed to grow very straight as she looked at him with a sparkle in her eyes. It was some years since her wishes on any point had been met with determined opposition, and she was, as it happened, a little imperious by nature. Besides, though she scarcely realized how far this fact influenced her, the man had been singularly anxious to hasten to Lucy's assistance, and had dropped her fishing-book as the result of it.

"Am I to understand that you don't mean to do what I wish?" she asked.

"Well," replied Sydney, deferentially, "I suppose it amounts to that. I don't know whether you will resent my saying that I'm sorry it's necessary."

Clare did resent it. This was putting the question on another footing, and all she was bent on was making him do her will. In fact, though she was outwardly quiet, she lost her temper altogether.

"Then," she said haughtily, "I dare say you can realize what your opposition implies? It's disagreeable to insist upon this view of the matter, but you leave me no choice."

Sydney winced at this.

"You naturally mean that you can't be troubled with a man who won't do what he's told. In that case, I can only tell your father that he must get somebody else who is likely to prove more tractable."

The girl seemed to hesitate a moment, and it is more

than possible that had he pointed out that he was merely influenced by a desire to ensure her safety she would have conceded the point. He was, however, too proud to urge such a plea just then, and she had, it seemed, made up her mind to treat him as an obstreperous hired man. This being so, he was ready to regard the situation from her point of view.

"I must ask you to go on up the trail," she said.

Sydney's face was impassive, but he stood still.

"That," he responded, "can be done, but it's out of the question that I should help you up it. I dare say you have noticed that there are one or two places which you could hardly get up by yourself."

Clare glanced at the steep rise and decided that she could at least not make the ascent unassisted except by what promised to be a very undignified scramble, and Sydney spoke again.

"I'll go on," he added. "Haines left the small canoe on the other side of the ridge yesterday. If you will wait here I'll bring it back and paddle you round the crag." Then he smiled grimly. "Of course this doesn't change—the situation."

"It certainly doesn't," said Clare.

She sat down on a ledge, and Sydney clambered up among the rocks on the side of the spur. He disappeared beyond a higher ridge presently, and soon after he had done so there was a heavy crash above that rang startlingly across the woods. It was followed almost immediately by another, and after a few seconds there were three or four more outbreaks of almost deafening sound. Clare became a little anxious, for she knew what had taken place. As a rule, a burned tree in falling brings down several of its fellows. Even when it falls clear of the rest the concussion of the tremendous blow is not infrequently sufficient to disturb the precarious equilibrium of the neighboring charred columns.

There was no particular reason for believing that Sydney had been near the spot, for she could not tell exactly where the great trunks had come down, but she made an attempt to clamber up by the way he had taken. It proved a failure, however, for there was one place which it seemed possible to ascend only by crawling, and even before she reached it she tore her dress. Then she went back beyond the burned tract and glanced at the hillside, which was remarkably steep and covered with breast-high fern and tangled undergrowth just there. That way did not seem practicable either, and walking toward the lake she sat down to wait for the canoe. It was a long time before it appeared, and then she was disconcerted to notice that Simcoe was in it.

"Jardine asked me to paddle down for you," he said, when he had handed her in.

"Why didn't he come himself?" Clare asked with growing anxiety.

"He wanted to," answered Simcoe, and there was no doubt that Clare was conscious of considerable relief. "In fact, he seemed inclined to insist on it, but Haines and I wouldn't let him."

"Why?"

"He was limping quite badly when he joined us besides being covered all over with dust and charcoal. His face was a little gray, too, and the man looked shaky."

Clare felt suddenly contrite as well as tensely anxious; but Simcoe's prosy slowness was exasperating.

"Can't you go on? Was he hurt?" she asked sharply.

"I don't think it's anything that you need concern yourself about."

Clare fancied that she had, perhaps, betrayed her alarm too plainly.

"As a matter of fact, I am concerned," she said.

"I may mention that I sent him on, though I believe he was doubtful about the safeness of that strip of bush."

"I was a little startled when he walked up to us, and it looks as if he must have had a narrow escape; but as he wanted to go back for you he couldn't have been greatly damaged. It appears that a big tree went down close beside him, but it was only a small bit of the top, or a burned branch or something, that actually struck him—it's perhaps only natural that he didn't seem very clear about the thing. After a little we sent him home. He assured us that he felt capable of getting there without any trouble, and he wouldn't let Haines go with him."

Clare was sensible of a good deal of confusion, but she was certainly relieved, for it scarcely seemed reasonable to suppose that the man had been badly hurt when he had insisted on walking home two or three miles alone. Haines, she felt sure, would have gone with him had it appeared necessary. She asked no more questions and talked about something else while Simcoe paddled down the lake.

In the meanwhile Sydney was painfully limping homeward through the bush, though he sat down on anything that offered a convenient resting-place every few minutes. He could not remember exactly how he had been injured, and indeed was never sure of anything beyond the fact that a great burned tree had come down close beside him, and that he had fallen amid a blinding cloud of dust, out of which he crawled a few moments later, faint and dazed by a heavy blow. It seemed most probable that a mass of charcoal flung off from the trunk had fallen on him, though he was inclined to think that part of it had struck the ground first and so lessened the shock. His chest and side and the outer part of one thigh felt extremely stiff and sore, and it was painful to move, but as he could

do so and hold himself straight by an effort, it was evident that no bones were broken.

He had insisted on setting out for his ranch as soon as he realized that to go back for Clare and then make the journey home would be beyond his power. He would have preferred to do this had he felt equal to it, but as he could not overcome the unpleasant dizziness that troubled him he did not wish her to find him sitting beside the creek with the others in attendance on him when she arrived. It would appear too much like posing as the injured victim of her arbitrariness, which he shrank from doing.

Once or twice he found it necessary to sit down for a considerable time, and it was indeed only by an effort that he forced himself to get up again; but, half-dazed as he still was, he wondered what the outcome of the matter would be. One thing was clear. He had been relieved of his duties, and if he was to resume them, the first suggestion that he should do so must be made by Clare. It took him a long time to reach his dwelling, and when he entered it his face had grown gray again with pain. He sat still a while, leaning hard upon the table, and wondering heavily whether Clare would expect him to inform her father that he did not intend to continue in his service; until he decided that it might be better to leave her to supply Carteret with her version of the affair. He was assisted in arriving at this conclusion by the fact that he was far from sure that he could walk as far as the ranch; and by and by he got into his bunk with some difficulty, dressed as he was, and, worn out with pain and the effort to reach home, sank into heavy sleep.

It was dusk when the rest of the party arrived at Carteret's ranch, and as they crossed the clearing Clare looked about her, half expecting to see Sydney. There was, however, no sign of him, though when she made inquiries at the house it appeared that he had been told

that the supply of stovewood was insufficient for the morrow. This left her somewhat disturbed in mind, for hitherto he had attended to his duties punctually, and since he had not turned up it seemed clear that he had been prevented by his injury. By and by she followed Lucy, who strolled out on to the veranda.

"I'm uneasy about Jardine," she confessed. "It was to some extent my fault that he got hurt. He was afraid that some of the burned trees might fall, and I insisted on going on."

"And he wouldn't let you? I had a suspicion that something of the kind had happened, if only because he was so determined on getting away before you arrived. Shall I ask Haines or Simcoe to walk over and see how he is getting on?"

"No," said Clare; "I think it would be better if I went myself."

Lucy laughed in a suggestive manner.

"And you want me to come along? Anyway, I quite think you ought to go. If you had seen the poor man limping up to us, covered with charcoal, as if every movement hurt him, you would probably have felt a little ashamed of what you had done. We'll slip away now."

They followed a narrow trail through the dusky bush, and it was almost dark in Sydney's clearing when Clare tapped at the open door of his house, in which a dim light was burning. There was no answer, and as she waited a few moments, looking about her, the silence had its effect on her. Carteret's ranch was usually filled with sounds of life, laughter, footsteps and cheerful voices; but there was nothing to break the almost oppressive stillness here, and all round the little open space the forest rose in a black and solemn wall. It seemed to shut the place off from all touch with human interests and sympathies, and she wondered what it must be like in winter when her father's house

was closed. She shrank from contemplating the loneliness of that clearing then, and it seemed to her that there was a good deal the small rancher must forego.

She tapped again, a little more loudly, but there was still no answer, and beckoning Lucy to follow, she went in softly. A faint light streamed through an open door into the general room, and she noticed how horribly bare and comfortless it was. The man's life, she realized, must be a very austere as well as a lonely one, and as she remembered the attitude she had adopted that evening she felt more contrite as well as sorry for him. It was, however, evident at a glance that he was not in the outer room, and she realized that the most conventional thing would be to retire quietly; but the light in the next one drew her, and she felt that she could not go until she had, at least, discovered whether he was seriously hurt.

She stood still a moment or two, hesitating, while she glanced at the rough log walls, the rude chairs, and the litter of long boots and discarded garments that lay on the uncovered floor. Then Lucy pointed to the open door.

"He must be asleep in there," she said softly. "Are you going in?"

Clare raised her hand in warning, but there was no sound from the other room, and moving toward it cautiously she stopped just inside the doorway. There was nothing whatever in this room except the bunk against one wall and the lamp which hung beneath a beam. Sydney had been too dazed to think of putting it out. Moving forward another pace or two Clare stopped close beside the bunk and looked down upon the sleeping man with a flush in her face.

A very old brown blanket had fallen away from his breast, and she could see that the blue shirt he wore was still smeared with charcoal. The black grime was also upon his face, which was furrowed, as though his

sleep was light and he still felt weariness or pain. It was wet with perspiration, and she grew very compassionate as she gazed down at him, until she started, as he made a restless movement, after which she flitted silently out of the room. She said nothing to Lucy, who followed her out of the house, and when they stood outside in the clearing the latter turned to her inquiringly.

"He's asleep," said Clare. "I didn't waken him."

"Naturally," replied Lucy. "I don't think he would have appreciated it if you had done so. The man's hurt, or he wouldn't have left his light burning. Oil" —and she added this suggestively—"is probably rather dear up here, and the way he lives doesn't seem to indicate that he's overburdened with wealth. Now you have cut off the few dollars your father paid him."

"Well," said Clare, with a trace of sharpness, "you needn't make it worse."

Lucy felt that she had gone as far as was necessary, and they walked back silently to the ranch. Clare retired soon after they reached it, but she was up earlier than usual the next morning, and when she walked out on the veranda it was a vast relief to her to see Sydney crossing the clearing with an ax in his hand. She went down at once when she noticed that he moved awkwardly and wearily.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Split some wood," said Sydney. "It's almost run out. I felt I had better get a few days' supply ready."

Clare winced at this, for it opened up another question, and there was something to be said, but she did not shrink from it.

"In the first place, I don't think you are fit for it."

"I'm a little stiff and sore here and there, but nothing more than that."

"Still, Haines or Simcoe would cut all the wood we want, and it would be better if you went back and lay

down to-day. You could make up for it to-morrow."

"I understood that my services wouldn't be required any further."

"Sit down," said Clare, quietly, pointing to one of the logs laid ready for sawing, and when he obeyed her she turned to him with a smile. "If it's any satisfaction to you, I must confess that I was wrong yesterday."

"I don't think it's a very great one," replied Sydney. "It would be sufficient if you admitted that you didn't blame me any longer."

He broke off and waited, and the girl looked at him again.

"I don't," she responded. "Still, there is something more to be said. I don't suppose you have any wish to leave us?"

"No," answered Sydney, reflectively, "I don't think I have."

"Then it would be rather a pity if you didn't remain."

Sydney stood up and looked her steadily in the eyes.

"Well," he said, "in some respects I'm quite willing to stay, but wouldn't it be better to decide exactly in what capacity?"

Clare smiled at this.

"I don't want an attendant who considers himself entitled to dictate what I shall and what I shall not do."

"The question is, Do you want one who must never express an opinion of his own?"

"No," said Clare, softly, "I really think I want—a companion—one who has the courage not to let me do anything as foolish as what I wished to do yesterday. Still, I couldn't put up with too many remonstrances."

Sydney's eyes twinkled.

"In that case I have no doubt that we shall agree."

CHAPTER XVII

LUCY MAKES FLAPJACKS

FIERCE sunshine streamed down upon the hillside and gleamed upon the burnished rails of the climbing track which wound out of the dusky bush, and the air was still and heavy with the honey-like fragrance of the firs which climbed in somber masses from the river far below. Sydney sat in the shadow of a big water-tank in a little roadside station, and just outside the fence behind him Carteret's team stood with hanging heads, unsheltered from the heat. Sydney was feeling drowsy, for he had left his ranch about the middle of the previous night, and had failed to sleep when he put up the horses for a few hours' rest. The little wooden hotel was insufferably hot, and several bronzed prospectors, who had just come down from the range, had noisily celebrated the successful location of certain mineral claims.

He could have slept where he was sitting beneath the tank, but the station-agent had told him that the east-bound train was coming along on time, and as he had been sent to meet Lucy Brattan, who had gone to Vancouver a few days earlier, and another of Clare's friends, it was desirable that he should be awake when it arrived. By and by the scream of a whistle came ringing up the track, and he rose to his feet when the tolling of a bell broke through the slackening clatter of wheels. Then the big locomotive

and the long, dusty cars came clanking into the station, and when they stopped, Lucy and another young lady appeared on one of the platforms.

Sydney handed them down and asked for their checks; and he was standing near the baggage-car waiting for their trunks when a passenger who had alighted from the train laid a hand on his shoulder. Turning around suddenly he recognized a man he had met at a hotel farther east among the mountains, before he came to Carteret's ranch. He was smiling as he held out his hand.

"I never expected to run up against you here, but I'm glad I did," he exclaimed. "We stop a minute or two, and I wonder if you have as much use for a drink as I have, Mr.——"

"Jardine," said Sydney.

The other man appeared somewhat puzzled.

"No," he reflected, "I guess that wasn't it."

"Hilton, then," suggested Sydney.

"You ought to know your own name," said the stranger. "That's two of them you have mentioned. How many have you got?"

Sydney was disconcerted, but he laughed.

"As a matter of fact, I've three. I was wondering if you had confused me with the man you met with me."

"No," replied the other, with an air of reflection, "I've sure not got you mixed. I beat you out of a dollar for the biggest fish that evening up the creek." Then a light seemed to break in upon him. "Hilton was darker than you are. You're the one who was killed."

Though it cost him an effort, Sydney made a gesture of whimsical expostulation.

"That doesn't seem very likely," he suggested. "Anyway, I can't come with you for that drink as I'm just waiting for two ladies' baggage."

The stranger looked at him curiously.

"I'll get you fixed by and by when I've time to think over it."

He moved away in another moment or two, and Sydney, turning back toward the baggage-car, was by no means pleased to see Lucy Brattan standing a few yards behind him. He wondered whether she had been there long and how much she had heard, if indeed she had heard anything, for there was nothing to be gathered from her expression.

"You'll be careful with that trunk, won't you?" she said. "The lid has got broken."

Sydney got the trunk in question, and one or two other odds and ends, into the carriage, with the help of a lounger, after which Lucy turned to him as he was about to help her and her companion in.

"Ida," she said, and let her eyes rest on Sydney for a moment, "this is—Mr. Jardine." She indicated her companion. "Miss Ida Waltham."

Sydney bowed, and forthwith set about getting them into the carriage, for he did not wish to afford Miss Brattan any unnecessary opportunity for studying his face just then. He had observed her little pause before she mentioned his name, and wondered whether it had been accidental, or whether she had meant it to be significant. The latter seemed very probable, as she could not have been far away when the man he had met asked him how many names he had.

He started the horses down the rutted trail that led into the bush, but the more he thought of the matter the less he liked it. There was no doubt that if Miss Brattan had heard what was said it would act as an incentive to her curiosity, which he had already reason for dreading. She, however, made no attempt to include him in the conversation, which, as it was contrary to her usual custom, struck him as strange, and he volunteered no remark. Indeed, he was pleased that

the state of the trail afforded him a sufficient excuse for paying no attention to his companions.

It was a very long drive as well as a rough one, and the team were badly jaded when they reached Carteret's ranch late at night. Lucy and her companion went straight into the house, and Sydney carried the baggage in and put the team up, and then walked back to his own dwelling, too tired to concern himself much about anything just then.

The next morning, however, the recollection of his meeting with the man at the station once more troubled him, though, after considering the matter carefully, he decided that he had, perhaps, no great cause for anxiety. The man lived near a little, desolate settlement in the neighborhood of the scene of the accident; but Sydney had spent only an hour or two in his company, and the configuration of the country, which was traversed by mountain spurs, precluded much intercourse between the scattered inhabitants of the different valleys. It therefore seemed reasonable to suppose that even if his chance acquaintance eventually identified him as Carteret, the most that could result from this would be some casual mention of the fact in a hotel or store which would be most unlikely to reach the ears of his employer. There, however, remained the disturbing possibility that Miss Brattan's suspicions might have been aroused, and his misgivings upon that point proved warranted during the afternoon.

Carteret's guests, after spending some hours on the water, had landed for the six-o'clock supper, which Sydney set about preparing in the bush. He had just made a fire, and announced to the others, who were lounging about, that it would probably be an hour before the meal was ready, when Simcoe suggested that in the meanwhile they might, perhaps, catch a trout in a creek that flowed through the shadow some little dis-

tance away. One of the others mentioned a rare fern which was supposed to flourish in the vicinity, and Lucy, who had lately displayed an interest in botany, promptly despatched Haines and Miss Waltham in search of a specimen. This broke the party up, for the rest of her companions decided to stroll through the bush. Sydney fancied that she had intended to get rid of them for some particular purpose, and he wondered what she would do next, when she sat down beside the fire.

"It's hardly reasonable to expect Jardine to get supper for such a lot of us, and I want to learn how to make flapjacks," she said. "I think I'll stay behind and help him."

Sydney would much rather have had her go with the others, but this was a thing he could not insist on. He fancied that Clare favored her with a swift, half-suspicious glance, but she made no objection, and by and by the others strolled away, leaving him, as he realized, at Miss Brattan's mercy.

"I think I'll go to the creek and fill the kettles," he said, and decided that he would stay away as long as possible.

Lucy smiled at him.

"You evidently didn't notice that I made Simcoe fill them. You see how thoughtful I was."

Sydney realized that she had thought it all out unpleasantly carefully, for it was quite clear that she had determined on securing an interview with him alone. He did not think any of the others had suspected this, with the possible exception of Clare; but then they had not the reasons for guessing her intentions that he had. She did not, however, immediately say anything alarming, but sat still, merely watching him with the somewhat ominous amusement still in her eyes.

"How do you make flapjacks?" she asked at length.

"If I must tell the truth, I'm not quite sure. A

man called Brodie once gave me a few hazy ideas upon the subject, but I must confess that those I have so far succeeded in producing were scarcely fit to eat. Anyway, we'll let Simcoe have most of them. I don't think they'll injure him."

Lucy laughed, for Simcoe usually ate somewhat voraciously.

"Brodie?" she queried. "The name seems familiar though I can't connect it with anybody."

"You probably saw him when he called at the ranch. He's the man I went up into the ranges with."

"Oh, yes," said Lucy, "where the accident was!"

Her eyes seemed to rest on his face for a moment or two; but he made no answer, and she changed the subject casually.

"Well," she went on, "shall we start on the flapjacks? If you'll tell me what you know about the operation, I think I'll try to make them."

Sydney partly filled a big indurated ware basin with flour, and added water. Then he handed it to her with a large flat spoon.

"I understand that the great thing is to beat it up thoroughly—you must get it light," he explained. "Splash it round and round, as fast and as long as you can. In the meanwhile, as the fire's not big enough, I'll get some more wood."

He picked up a small ax he had brought with him and turned away; but he had not been gone five minutes when Lucy called to him. He continued chopping, but she persisted, and he reluctantly rejoined her.

"I want you to look and tell me whether this will do," she said, holding out the basin.

Sydney glanced at it gravely.

"No," he answered, "you haven't beaten it half enough. You must keep on until it's all whisked up."

"But it makes my wrists ache and splashes on my dress."

"I suppose a certain degree of trouble is the usual penalty of acquiring knowledge."

Lucy deliberately laid the basin down.

"The difficulty is that I haven't acquired any yet. You are a little, we'll say smarter, than I thought you were, but you're not in the least clever. If you had been you would, of course, have recognized that there was no use in trying to escape from the inevitable."

Sydney sat down opposite her.

"I suppose that's correct," he admitted dryly. "Go ahead."

The girl fixed her eyes on him steadily.

"I was close behind you yesterday at the station—when you were waiting at the baggage-car. Who is —the one who was killed?"

He met her gaze, and there was, she noticed, nothing that suggested guilt in his face.

"Well," he confessed, "I partly expected this. I suppose you mean to insist on my answering?"

"I'm afraid I must. Can't you understand that there's a certain duty laid upon me? Carteret is an old friend of my people's, and I'm very fond of Clare."

Sydney made a sign of assent.

"I can't reasonably object to your attitude. You are probably wondering what nefarious purpose I have in view?"

"Is it necessary to raise that question? I will tell you what I know. You came here with an assumed name, and you crept into the ranch one night not very long ago."

"Ah," said Sydney, "you knew that, too! Still, perhaps you didn't guess that Haines also discovered me. He was, however, content with my assurance that I was doing no harm." He spread out his hands. "It was more than I could have reasonably expected of him. The thing must have seemed incredible."

Lucy sat silent for a moment or two before she answered.

"I'm not necessarily hostile," she explained. "If you will think a little you will recognize that I went further than Haines did, because you have made me no assurances at all. Wouldn't it be better if you gave me the information I asked for?"

"Then the man at the station was referring to Sydney Jardine Carteret, who is supposed to have been killed by the landslide in the range."

There was no doubt that Lucy was startled, but he read comprehension in her eyes.

"I have to admit," he added, "that when he identified me as Carteret he was quite correct."

An awkward silence followed the announcement, and lasted for a few moments, until Lucy spoke again.

"This," she declared, "is beyond anything I could have foreseen."

"I can readily believe it, but it doesn't seem very material. The fact which concerns me most is that I am altogether in your hands."

Lucy leaned forward toward him confidentially.

"Will you tell me exactly what brought you out from England? Did you come to marry Clare?"

"I didn't," answered the man, and his voice was suggestively sharp. "I shouldn't like you to think that of me."

"Then what did you come for—and what decided you to disappear? I know something dreadful happened, but the Carterets have never told me all the story."

Sydney made up his mind that she should hear it, for it was clearly no use doing things by halves now, and the way she looked at him was reassuring. He spoke for five or six minutes, and when he broke off Lucy's eyes were very soft.

"Oh," she murmured, "you have my full sympathy,

and if I have hurt you by making you tell me this, I am sorry. Still, perhaps, that's beside the question, isn't it?"

"No," replied Sydney, "your sympathy is valuable to me."

The girl's face was very quiet, but for a moment he fancied that it was a little warmer in coloring than usual.

"You can at least be sure of it; but the most important thing is to decide what you must do," she said.

"It's decided already. If you feel that it's your duty to tell Carteret what you have heard, I shall go away at once. I can't stay here as his relative, ruined and discredited."

"Nobody could blame you for that trouble in England."

"Thank you," said Sydney. "Still, even if it's not my own fault, I am discredited."

"You would not like to go away?"

"Far from it. I don't know where to go, or what to do."

"Are you quite sure that is your only reason?"

Sydney looked at her sharply, and she met his gaze with one of steady, insistent inquiry.

"No," he admitted, "it is not the only one."

Lucy sat very still for a few seconds before she spoke again.

"Then you expect some change, after which you will tell Carteret and Clare?" she suggested.

"Yes," answered Sydney. "Perhaps I am unwisely sanguine, but a change may come. I have some shares in a mine here which may become valuable—which would make things easier for me. Besides, the memory of the English trouble will soften with time."

"But if you are disappointed and there is no change at all?"

It was a question he had expected, and he felt that he must speak plainly. There was no doubt that his companion understood why he wished to remain near Clare Carteret.

"In that case I shall give up my ranch and go away."

"But mayn't it be harder to do that then?"

Sydney's face grew rather grim.

"It is possible," he said quietly, "but it will have to be done."

There was once more an embarrassing silence, and then Lucy spoke in a steady voice.

"Mr. Carteret," she said, "it is, perhaps, fortunate that you have my good opinion. Because of it I can promise to keep your secret. I do not think it is necessary to tell Clare or her father what I have heard." She rose abruptly. "Hadn't we better get on with the flapjacks?"

Sydney beat up the flour and water, and at his direction she poured a little into the hot frying-pan. Then she tossed the resultant pancake out on to a plate beside the fire, and added to the growing pile until the basin was empty. Soon afterward the others arrived, and Simcoe, who ate most of the flapjacks, expressed his entire satisfaction.

"Excellent!" he commented. "We must leave Miss Brattan behind with Jardine to cook on another occasion."

Lucy looked across at Sydney with a smile.

"They are really by no means as bad as I fancied they were going to be," she said.

Simcoe, who was not always very judicious, turned to Clare.

"I wonder what she means by that?"

"I don't know," replied Clare, whose brows grew suggestively straight. "Lucy likes to be enigmatical now and then."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NEW LODE

CARTERET was sitting in his own room with the light of the shaded lamp on his face, which was unusually thoughtful, when Sydney, for whom he had sent, was shown in. The mail-carrier had arrived half an hour earlier, as dusk was closing down upon the clearing, and several open letters, as well as one or two which Carteret had apparently just written, lay upon the table. He took up one of the latter as he looked at Sydney.

"I want you to ride over to the railroad the first thing to-morrow, Jardine," he said. "You will go straight to Vancouver with this letter, and deliver it at the hardware and machinery store it's addressed to. They'll give you a pulsometer steam pump cased up for transport, and you'll start for Long Divide by the first train, paying express freight on it. When you get off the train hire a man and as many packhorses as may be required, and don't let the thing out of your sight until you hand it over to the manager at the mine. I understand that the steam and delivery tubing has been sent up already, but you'll make sure of that before you leave the store. If the pump has not arrived make arrangements to have it sent on immediately the hardware people get it, and take the manager at Long Divide this letter. Come back as soon as he gives you his answer."

He handed Sydney another envelope, which was heavily sealed, and a roll of paper money.

"You won't waste a moment or spare expense if you can save time by it," he added. "You can charge me what you think fit for the extra services."

Sydney made a sign of comprehension.

"If I started now, sir, I might get the train in the early morning."

"I'm afraid it's out of the question." Carteret took out his watch. "Anyway, you can try it. You'll do what you can. It's a matter of urgent importance."

Sydney put the letters and money into his pocket, and, saying nothing further, strode out of the room, while Carteret once more busied himself with his papers. A few minutes later he placed them in his desk and went out on the veranda, where Clare and Mrs. Graham were sitting. Just then a half-seen man led a horse, which plunged and backed away from him, into the clearing, and the three on the veranda watched him struggle with it until he scrambled into the saddle. The horse had very seldom been ridden, and had done practically nothing for the last week or two. It reared when it felt his weight, and plunged savagely, then shot away into the shadows at a furious gallop, and Carteret smiled appreciatively when he turned to his companions.

"Jardine has been very smart. I've sent him off to Long Divide."

"We had something for him to do to-morrow," said Clare. "Couldn't you have got another messenger at the settlement?"

"I could have got several, but none in whom I'd have had quite the same confidence. The man's not brilliant, but when he undertakes a thing he generally stays with it in a way that pleases me."

"He has now been with us some time and I never

noticed anything about him that suggested stupidity," said Clare, with a trace of sharpness.

Just then Lucy and Simcoe came up the veranda steps, and it was evident that they had overheard.

"Has anybody been calling Jardine stupid?" the man inquired. "If you have done that, Mr. Carteret, you'd better be on your guard."

"I merely suggested that he wasn't brilliant," Carteret explained. "If I had felt inclined to go any further I wouldn't have sent him off on an important errand."

It was Lucy to whom he turned, and she laughed.

"I think," she said, "if you have made what you wanted quite clear you can count on having your instructions carried out. After all, that's a good deal, isn't it?"

"One would fancy that there couldn't be very much variety of opinion on the point. At the same time, and just to prove that one should not expect too much from any man, I can mention a case in which my instructions to Jardine had a different result."

"You mean when you sent him up to the range—to dig? Have the two choppers you hired since been more successful?"

"I can't say they have," Carteret admitted.

"You must not say anything against Jardine in either of these ladies' hearing," Simcoe broke in with a laugh. "They're staunch partizans of his, and I understand that after giving the rest of us up Miss Brattan's interesting him in botany. He teaches her how to make flapjacks, and after consuming most of the last attempt I'll confess that she's making progress."

"When I'm a partizan of anybody it's proof that he's at least amusing," said Lucy, and added rather dryly, "in Clare's case it's more probably a sign of merit."

"The only time I remember Jardine as amusing was when the trail-cutters shot his cow," objected Simcoe, and as nobody answered him he followed Clare and Lucy, who went into the house together.

When they had disappeared Mrs. Graham glanced at Carteret.

"Something has turned up in connection with the mine?" she inquired.

"A letter from the man up there. They've had trouble with water breaking in, and falls of rock. As I'm still apparently as far as ever from securing those English proxies, it's essential that we should get some of the ore out and reduced before the stockholders' meeting. If I can satisfy everybody that it's payable ore I shall probably succeed in carrying out my scheme. If not, it's very likely that I shall be beaten. Now, perhaps, we'd better go in."

In the meanwhile Sydney was riding hard over a very rough and in places a somewhat perilous trail, but he did not spare his horse or trouble himself greatly about the possibility of getting a broken limb. He had gathered that there was a crisis of some kind impending in the affairs of the Long Divide, and the fact that concerned him most was that he held shares which it seemed might after all become valuable. All night he rode through thick darkness, which was filled with sweet resinous scents, slipping and stumbling down steep inclines, and splashing through shallow fords; and the first sunrays were streaming between the ranks of serried trunks when the jaded horse plodded, foul-coated and flecked with spume, down the rutted trail to a little wooden settlement. The scream of a whistle rang across the pines as he rode into it, and the big train was moving when he swung himself up on to a car platform.

On reaching Vancouver the pump was delivered to him packed in two cases, for a pulsometer is not a

bulky machine when detached from its piping, and he started back to the range with it by the next train. He had had no sleep for most of three nights, and he was worn with the forced journey when he eventually reached the mine late one evening. Making inquiries at the shaft-head he was told that the manager was below.

"I guess he won't be up again until to-morrow," his informant said. "Anyway, I can't let you down without permission. Better go along and see if the cook will give you some supper."

He promised, however, to send down a message, and Sydney sat down and waited until the man at the shaft-head told him to take his place in a big tub which had come up loaded with broken rock. Then a bell tinkled, there was a rattle of running wire, and the tub plunged down into the blackness of the shaft with bewildering rapidity. When it stopped, Sydney got out and found himself standing in the mouth of a low-arched tunnel, with a black pit at his feet. Water was splashing into the latter, and there was a wheezing and gurgling in the big pipes that ran up overhead. In front of him odd lights blinked here and there down a long gallery, with a turbid rivulet flowing along one side of it; and a dripping, mire-daubed man who brushed past him, with a little flat lamp hooked into his hat, informed him that the manager was busy somewhere farther on. The man disappeared the next moment, and Sydney plodded along the gallery, stumbling over fragments of fallen rock, while trickles of water splashed upon him, until at last he reached a spot where another heading branched off. There was rather more light here, and he stopped to look about him.

The heading was lower than the other one, and it seemed even wetter, for a constant stream of big drops fell glinting athwart the light. The roof of it was held up by stout sections of smaller firs, with massive props

driven in beneath them on either side; but he could see that some of them bent inward ominously, and that the tops of several of the props were slightly crushed, while a pile of shattered rock, which had evidently fallen not long ago, lay close by. In one place he could see two or three shadowy, half-naked figures putting in another prop, which seemed rather too long for the space between floor and roof, for one man held it at a slight slant while the others strove to drive it straight with ponderous hammers. A little nearer him four or five more, stripped to the waist, and splashed with mire and water, were toiling savagely, raising a great square mass of stone and timber that was apparently intended to reach to the roof. A confused din, which reverberated in a curious half-muffled fashion, came out of the darkness beyond them, and he could distinguish the thud of heavy hammers, the ever-present splash of water, and the ringing clink of drills.

Then a man in very wet overalls appeared suddenly out of the shadows and unceremoniously took the sealed letter from his hand. Tearing it open with wet fingers, he smeared it badly in his haste as he read:

"It is essential that you should get a good supply of the high-grade ore down to the reducing plant before the date already specified. I rely on your utmost efforts to carry out my wishes in this respect, and if it will expedite matters you need not hesitate about increasing your salary bill."

There was a little more to the same effect, and then an intimation that the messenger, who would bring an answer back, could be trusted. The man thrust the letter into his pocket and turned to Sydney.

"You brought up that pump?" he asked.

Sydney said he had done so, and his companion's face was expressive of relief.

"That's one weight off my mind. It looks as if we

would have been washed out if we hadn't got the thing," he said. "We struck a wetter streak a little while ago, and there's quite a creek running into this heading. I'll write you an answer in the morning. It's impossible for me to go up now, and you can't start back to-night."

Sydney replied that he would have done so, only that his horse was badly jaded; and his companion flung a swift glance at him.

"Then if you don't feel above earning two or three dollars you can take a hand in with this shift," he said. "I'll have to call some of the boys off to fix that pump, and if we don't get the roof wedged up right away we'll have it coming in on us. You can keep your eyes open, too, and tell Carteret what we're up against. You'll probably have some notion of it before to-morrow."

This prediction was, as it happened, subsequently justified, but in the meanwhile Sydney, stripping off his jacket, replaced one of the men who had been engaged in building up the pile he had already noticed. The rest gave him a few instructions, but these were brief, for it was evident that they were somewhat anxious and were working in feverish haste. The reason for the latter fact was made clear by the downward bending of the heavy timbers and the odd crashes that broke out somewhere in the darkness.

"Can't you get a move on?" one of them shouted to a comrade by and by. "Unless we're through with the thing, and can get some new timbers in, we're going to have this piece of the adit caving right in by sunup."

"That's the fault of the boss," said another. "He would cut in under instead of leaving part of the sound face as a pillar. That last shot brought out way too much rock. I'd have put in 'bout half the giant-powder."

Sydney asked a question, and one of the others, who

seemed to be a man of some education, answered him.

"The older workings are tolerably sound, but we're in a bad streak here," he explained. "It's a broken stratification, and though we try to avoid it, some of the cracks fall in between the props. Still, most of the trouble is due to the last big shot, which had results nobody could reasonably have looked for. Anyway, the boys have been promised a big bonus if they can get what the boss wants done, and we'll make things a little safer when we have run this pile up."

Sydney fancied that he was right, for they were laying big sawed-up trunks over one another in a rectangular frame and filling it in and wedging it fast with massive stones. It was evident that when the mass reached the roof the latter could not come down until the upper layers were ground to powder.

The man, however, turned away, and Sydney said nothing further. He needed all his breath, and although he had now acquired the full use of his muscles he was dripping with perspiration. He would have stripped off his shirt as the others had done, only that he found every moment occupied. Before he heaved up each ponderous stone or log somebody was calling for another, and it was necessary to keep the men supplied.

For the first hour or two he forgot that he had made a long journey over a very rough trail. The rush and stress of the work engrossed his attention, and he was half-conscious of a desire to prove himself the equal of his companions in physical prowess. The hazard which he fancied they were all facing also lent a certain zest to the task, and once he smiled as it occurred to him that it was a curious state of affairs for him to be toiling savagely for two or three dollars in a mine in which he held a large block of shares.

After a while, however, the zest began to fade away, and he became conscious of an increasing weariness and an unpleasant ache in his side and back. He also

remembered later that he had eaten nothing since his mid-day meal on the trail, and that there was apparently very little probability of his getting anything more until breakfast on the morrow. This was not a pleasant reflection, and he became sensible of a growing desire to sit down and smoke, though it was clearly out of the question. He had undertaken to help these men, and he meant to do it. Intense physical weariness was, as he had discovered, a thing which must frequently be endured by the man unburdened with money in his adopted country, and, like his companions, he held his overtaxed muscles to their task by sheer force of will.

In the meanwhile water splashed upon him, and his hands were getting raw; somebody had dropped a heavy stone on his foot, and he fancied that he had torn a large strip of skin off his arm. He was aching all over before another two hours had passed, but the pile was rapidly rising, and still the adit rang with muffled sounds of tense activity. The manager, it seemed, had promised a bonus over and above regular wages if a certain quantity of ore could be got out by a day specified. Now and then half-seen men went by, dragging heavy timbers or hauling clattering tubs on wheels, and sometimes there was a crash in the darkness and a faster rush of water.

At length the pile reached the roof, and two or three of the men standing on a platform swung ponderous hammers as they drove in the last stones. Then one of them signed to Sydney to follow him, and they splashed through the water into the semi-darkness. They stopped a few minutes to help two men who were hammering a heavy prop into place, and then one of them held up his lamp and pointed significantly to a neighboring timber which had bent outward a little in the middle.

"I guess it's just as well we got that prop in," he

said. "You can see the weight that's on the other. Looks as if there'll be no more powder used until we've got her shored up solid. Boss said something about stopping at sunup and doubling every prop."

Sydney suggested that it might have been better if this had been done earlier, and his companion explained that the need for it had become apparent only during the last few hours, and that most of the new timbers had not yet been hauled in from the bush.

They went on a little farther, until they came to a tub on wheels, which somebody told Sydney to fill. There was a pile of shattered rock close by, and he proceeded to fling pieces of it into the tub, glancing about him as he did it, though there was very little that he could see. One or two indistinct figures were working not far away, and the dim tunnel was filled with the thud of hammers and the sharp ringing of drills.

By and by the tub was full, and he set off with it toward the mouth of the tunnel, pushing it before him laboriously, for there were no rails laid down, and the floor was rough and covered with fallen stone. He had gone only a few yards and was in darkness when there was a sharp cry behind him and a clatter of running feet. Turning suddenly, he saw one or two of the lights go out, and a man who came stumbling out of the obscurity waved a hand to him.

"Get out for your life!" he cried.

Sydney decided to take the hint, and left the tub behind; but he had hardly moved a few paces when he stumbled and fell heavily upon a pile of props. Before he picked himself up several other men dashed past, and it seemed to him that the timbers all about him were cracking and bending. He set off again at the best pace he could manage, and just as he reached the support he had helped to build there was a deafening crash behind him, and the floor seemed to rock beneath his feet. In another moment he floundered out

into the older workings, where he joined a cluster of excited men and fancied that he was comparatively safe. Looking back he saw that there was now only blackness in the new heading. Then the manager came running into the midst of them.

"All of you here, boys?" he cried.

It seemed that nobody was absent or injured, and the manager indicated some of the men with a wave of his hand.

"We'll go back in a few minutes, boys, and see what can be done. The rest of you will go up and haul as many as possible of the sawed props down from the bush to the shaft-head. We'll start with them to-morrow." Then he looked at Sydney. "You'd better lay off for a few hours and be ready to start back when I can give you an answer for Carteret."

Sydney had no desire to linger in the mine, and when he reached the shaft-head he found it singularly pleasant to see the moon above the black pines and feel the cool night air upon his dripping face. He found the log shanty where the men lived, and lying down in a bunk filled with spruce twigs was fast asleep in a few minutes. He breakfasted early the next morning, and soon afterward a man bade him go to the office, where the manager was waiting for him. The latter, who still wore his wet overalls, sat heavy-eyed at a little table, with a letter in his hand.

"This is for Carteret, and I've tried to make him understand how we're fixed," he said. "In case he asks you any questions, you can tell him as much as you can remember about the accident last night. The main point is that I expect to get to work again in about a week, though it's going to be the tightest fit to get out the ore he wants."

Sydney took the letter, and before half an hour had passed he was riding back toward the settlement through the shadowy bush.

CHAPTER XIX

A DISCREDITED ALLY

EARLY in the evening of the day on which Sydney left the mine, Neilson, its manager, sat in his little iron-roofed office with a plan of the workings spread out in front of him. He looked worn and jaded, for he had been on his feet for the past twenty-four hours, and he had not changed his wet clothes yet. He was a young and ambitious man, indebted to Carteret for his appointment, and expectant of further favors to come. The latter fact, however, was not the only thing which had impelled him to a very determined grapple with natural difficulties during the last few weeks, for his employer, who could read character shrewdly, was, as one result of it, usually fortunate in the choice of his servants.

The door of the office stood open, and by and by Neilson, resting one elbow on the table, looked wearily out upon the clearing. A trail of blue smoke that floated across it hung in heavy wisps among the firs on the other side, and a rhythmic clang, so many times every minute, and the intermittent splash and gurgle of water told that the pumps were working steadily. This was consoling, as far as it went. Presently a man and a couple of brawny oxen hauling a jumper sled broke out from an opening in the trees on the hillside. They came down the declivity at a run, which is not a usual thing in the case of logging oxen, and Neilson was

glad to see the big load of sawed-up firs behind them. It showed that the men he had sent up into the bush were carrying out his instructions, for immediately the adit roof had come down he had, with characteristic energy, proceeded to clear out the fallen rock and shore it up again with doubled props. So long as the men seconded him willingly, which they seemed inclined to do, he felt that the delay might, after all, not seriously imperil his employer's plans. On the other hand, he was quite aware that the results would be particularly unfortunate if they made any difficulties now.

This was why he frowned when one of them walked toward the office, for there was something suggestive of determination in the miner's manner. The fact that he had come up from the workings half an hour earlier than he should have done in the usual course appeared equally significant, and Neilson looked at him sharply when he walked in.

"Well," he inquired, "what is it, Jim? More trouble below?"

"No," replied the man, dryly. "Seems to me you've got about all you've any use for already. I've been down most of two shifts together, and I was feeling kind of played out. There's a crick in my back that's worrying me."

Neilson had reasons for supposing that this was not so much an explanation as a delicate intimation that the miner did not mean to distress himself unduly for the benefit of his employers.

"Then you're probably not very different from the rest of the boys," he said. "Couldn't you have stood another half-hour of it?"

Jim grinned.

"It seemed to me I'd held this job about long enough. I'm kind of tired of drilling."

Neilson considered this for a moment or two. He

was quite convinced that a dislike for drilling was not the only reason that had prompted the man to seek the interview.

"Is there anything else you would be content to do?" he asked grimly.

"I wouldn't mind looking after the timbering; but it's a question of money."

"That is what I expected," Neilson admitted. "How much do you want?"

"We'll call it another two dollars a day, and I get my share of the bonus, too."

The demand was manifestly exorbitant, but because it was so Neilson realized that the man must have some reason for believing that he could enforce it. It was necessary to disabuse him of that impression, but there was a certain hazard in the thing, and he decided to proceed circumspectly.

"How could I give it to you without having the rest of the boys strike me for the same?" he asked.

"That," said Jim, with a smile which Neilson fancied was meant to be provocative, "is your lookout. Still, if you put me on to a special job it might be done. Anyway, if you want to keep me you have got to raise those two dollars!"

Neilson, leaning forward a little, looked at him steadily while he turned the matter over in his mind, though the general situation of which it seemed to form a part was reasonably clear to him. To begin with, he knew that it was Carteret's policy to let no information about the yield of ore or the difficulties they had to contend with at the mine leak out. The latter's colleagues on the directorate would, of course, be entitled to inspect the reports Neilson supplied; but there was not a great deal to be gathered from them, and Carteret had hitherto been left to conduct affairs very much as he wished. Now, Neilson supposed, he desired to lay before the stockholders unexpectedly a

concise statement showing that so many tons of high-grade ore had been mined and treated at a definite cost, with the precise yield of silver and copper certified by the manager of the reducing plant. There was little doubt that they would support him in spite of any opposition, if that information should be placed suddenly in their hands. It seemed probable, however, that Carteret would not desire to offer his opponents an opportunity for discounting the information, or getting up figures and estimates to belittle its importance; and, in addition to this, he would be reluctant to throw out a further incentive to the men who were scheming to take over the concern.

Neilson, having all this in view, had already decided that it was desirable to keep every man at work there at the mine, since it would in that case be difficult for any of them to send out information. There was no mail-carrier, and he usually went down to the nearest settlement to post or bring up his letters. He had, however, for some time been inclined to suspect that Jim had been sent to Long Divide as a spy.

"As it happens, I've no intention of giving you an extra cent," he said.

"Then I guess I'll quit to-night."

"Unless you get permission you can't quit without due notice."

"Well," drawled Jim, "I feel like trying it. You have only three days' time of mine in hand, and it wouldn't worry me very much if you stuck to that!" He lowered his voice confidentially. "Quite sure you're open to let me go?"

It was a difficult question. Neilson would certainly have preferred to keep him where he could be watched; but on the other hand there was the probability that his companions would make trouble if the man should be granted the increase of pay he demanded. There was nothing in the suggested duties that would warrant

this, and it appeared possible that if the rest of the miners were led to believe that he was willing to raise wages indiscriminately they would clamor for a share. He was also afraid that Jim would make it clear to them that what their employer had been forced to do in one man's case he could as readily be forced to do in that of another. Since there was a hazard in either course he took the simpler one.

"Oh, yes," he said. "The sooner you get out the better!"

The man seemed disagreeably astonished, but it was evident that Neilson meant what he said, and he made a sign of acquiescence.

"Then I'll start after supper."

He waited another second or two, but Neilson, looking down at the plan in front of him, showed no disposition to change his mind, and he withdrew.

An hour or two afterward Neilson entered the men's living shanty, where the cook was busy.

"I suppose Jim has gone?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes," replied the cook. "He asked me for an old flour-bag, and I gave him one. He'd made his pack up then, but when I saw him just outside the shack, a little later, that bag was full." He paused and looked at Neilson in a suggestive manner. "It kind of struck me there was something in it that was heavy."

"Thank you," said Neilson. "It's just as well you mentioned it."

He went back to his office and wrote a note to the storekeeper at the nearest settlement, where he bought a good many supplies. The man, as he was consoled to remember, also kept the one hotel in the place. Then he sent for a couple of men whom he fancied he could trust.

"Jim has quitted," he informed them. "I've reasons for believing he has taken a bag of ore along with him, and I want that ore back. If you could manage

to bring it to me it would probably be worth your while."

One of the miners laughed, and when he looked at his companion, who made a sign of assent, it became evident that Jim was not a favorite of theirs, as Neilson had suspected when he sent for them.

"I guess we'll try," he said. "Anyway, it will be a change from shoveling."

Neilson handed them the note to the storekeeper. "If he reaches the settlement ahead of you, give this to Hollins. He'll no doubt think of some way of getting hold of that ore. If he can't, you'll have to set your wits to work."

They smiled and went out, and in less than five minutes they were plodding along the shadowy trail at the best pace they could make. It was, however, the next day when they reached a little wooden settlement without having seen any sign of Jim, and after cautiously approaching the hotel and not finding him there, they delivered the note to the proprietor, who grinned when he read it.

"I guess I've got to see your boss through. The man's out just now, but he's not going on to the railroad until to-morrow. Said he wanted a rest, and that's quite likely, seeing that his pack was blamed heavy. If I were you I'd go right up and prospect in his room."

They did as he suggested, and departed in haste immediately afterward; and they were camping beside a fire in the bush two or three leagues from the hotel when Jim strode up to the proprietor as supper was being cleared away.

"Where's that bag I brought along?" he demanded.

"I didn't see any bag," said Hollins. "You brought a pack."

"The bag was in it. I put it under the bed."

"Well," returned Hollins, dryly, "that's a kind of

curious place to keep things. If you were anxious about it why didn't you give it to me?"

Jim had raised his voice angrily, and some of the men lounging about after supper began to gather in the corridor where the two were speaking.

"What's the trouble?" asked one.

"The stranger says he's been robbed here," Hollins explained. "He put a bag under his bed, and somebody's gone off with it."

There was an incredulous murmur, and another of the men spoke.

"What was in it?" he asked.

Jim did not answer this until the question was repeated by one or two of the rest, when he said that it contained mineral specimens. Then Hollins appeared to reflect.

"Boys," he said, "this is a serious thing, and we've got to have it investigated. To begin with, he's from Long Divide, and he had mineral specimens in that bag. I guess we can take it for granted that they belonged to the company. Now, in a general way, a manager's mighty careful how he sends specimens out of a mine, and when he does it they're usually despatched to his directors or some boss mineralogist." He turned to Jim sharply. "You've got a letter with you about them?"

Jim looked round him with evident uneasiness, but several more men had joined the others, and he did not see how he was to get out of the corridor without their permission.

"I've no use for questions of that kind," he broke out savagely. "There was a bag of specimens under my bed, and I can't find the thing. I'll give you or the man who took it an hour to produce it."

This was followed by a little ironical laughter, which Hollins checked.

"It's an awkward charge, boys, and a reflection on

you all, but you needn't worry him just now. Seems to me the proper thing would be to send one of you off to Long Divide at sunup with a horse and bring old Shafter, the magistrate, in from his ranch when we get an answer." Then he turned to Jim. "You'll lie by and say no more in the meanwhile."

Jim appeared glad to get away, and apparently went to his room, but he was not there or anywhere else in the hotel when Hollins went up to look for him an hour or two later, which was, however, no more than the latter had anticipated. Subsequent inquiries revealed the fact that he had left a settlement some distance off by the Pacific train the next day.

On the afternoon of the day he reached Vancouver he called at an office there, and the clerk, who regarded him somewhat dubiously when he requested an interview with his employer, was a little astonished when he was told to show the man in. Jim was accordingly ushered into the inner office, and stood waiting face to face with Carteret's colleague, Brough.

"Well," questioned the latter, sharply, "why have you left Long Divide?"

Jim explained the matter at some length, and Brough sat silent for a moment or two afterward. He did not seem pleased by Jim's story.

"There's no doubt that they have now got hold of high-grade ore?" he asked.

"Not the least. It's a solid fact."

"They'll be some time clearing that heading," continued Brough. "I suppose they'll get it done?"

"About a week. Neilson's a hustler."

Brough's curiosity appeared satisfied, and he looked up at the man.

"Now," he inquired, "what do you expect me to do with you?"

"I guess I can leave you to fix that," said Jim, with a deprecatory smile which suggested that he was too

modest to decide upon the reward of his meritorious services.

"Then here's five dollars. You can get out to Comex, or down Puget Sound. They're in the middle of a land boom yonder."

"Five dollars!" Jim gazed at him in blank astonishment.

"Precisely!" snapped Brough. "What did you expect?"

"A hundred dollars, anyway, and a nice smooth job."

Brough laughed harshly.

"Do you think I've nothing to do but relieve incapables? Why did you try to bluff that extra money out of Neilson?"

"I figured I'd make something for myself. It seemed easy."

"It was considerably too hard for you. If you'd been smart you would have got your extra two dollars, and, what's more, the boys would have struck him for a big rise, too. On the other hand, when you had to quit, you could at least have brought out some specimens."

"I did. They robbed me at the hotel."

Brough's face showed his interest in this piece of news.

"In that case you can count on it that Neilson has them now." He made a gesture of disgust. "Here's your five dollars. A man who can be headed off that way is no use to me."

Jim cast a crestfallen glance at him, but it showed him that Brough meant exactly what he said. After being badly worsted by Neilson he scarcely felt equal to another encounter of a somewhat similar kind just then. He accordingly took the money and walked out of the office disconsolately, for things had by no means turned out as he had expected.

Soon after he had gone Brough sent a clerk to the telephone, and after a while another man connected with the mining business was shown in.

"You have some fresh news from Long Divide?" he asked.

Brough nodded.

"They've had trouble—part of the new heading has fallen in—which will keep them back at least a week. After that, the necessity for extra timbering will probably delay them further. As far as I can gather, it seems almost out of the question that they should get enough ore reduced to make much of an impression when they bring the matter before the stockholders at the meeting."

"Still, there's a certain possibility of its being done."

"It's a question of time. They'll strain every effort."

"I suppose you couldn't get hold of Neilson?" suggested his colleague.

"No," said Brough, decisively, "he's Carteret's man."

His companion looked thoughtful.

"Now they've got into the lode a little you're still sure about the ore?"

"There's no doubt that it's the very highest grade."

"Couldn't you get me a few more specimens?"

"I'm afraid not," answered Brough. "In fact, I tried and failed. I could demand some, but I don't want to give Carteret anything to go upon, and, after all, he mightn't let me have them. He's still running the concern in his usual autocratic fashion, and I'm not sure just yet about the support I would get from my other colleagues."

His companion made a sign of comprehension.

"A little downright candor is admissible now and then, and I must point out that I've very little to rely on beyond your assurances."

It was a suggestion that had been made to Brough in one or two shapes already, and he smiled.

"I'm afraid they'll have to be sufficient at present, but they'll shortly be corroborated by Carteret. The point is that he wouldn't be so bent on putting his scheme through unless it was going to be worth while."

The other man made a sign of assent.

"Well," he said, "we must leave the thing to you. Anyway, we can't get on much further until you have seen whether you can carry the meeting with you."

He rose and went out, while Brough took up a bundle of papers from the table.

CHAPTER XX

BROUGH FINDS A CLUE

THE Atlantic train was speeding along the hillside above the tremendous hollow through which the green Fraser flows when Brough sat in a corner of the open observation car with a cigar in his hand. It was draughty there, and the cinders that rattled like hail on the roof, as well as fragments of lifted ballast and thick red dust, whirled in; but the prospect seemed worth the slight discomfort, even to a man who already had gazed at it a good many times. To the couple of Englishmen who sat not far away it seemed altogether wonderful.

"This is the second cinder I have got in my eye in the last half-hour," said one of them, taking out his handkerchief. "Still, it's easy to put up with them when you have a panorama of this kind unrolling itself in front of you." He turned to Brough. "Is it as fine as this, sir, all the way to the Rockies?"

Brough smiled. The stranger's appreciation pleased him, for, like most of its inhabitants, he was proud of the Mountain Province; though it was not entirely its wild beauty which had brought him into the observation car. The rest of the train was very hot, and he had seen Nettleton, whom he rather preferred to avoid, board it at Vancouver.

"I should certainly say so," he replied. "You're from the East, and are going to Montreal?"

It was an easy guess, for one of the strangers, who nodded, still wore the white tope which usually marked the traveler from China or Japan.

"Yes," he said, "we came over from Yokohama by the *Empress of India,* and I am sorry now that I stayed a week at Colombo when we left England. I could have spent it at one of the hotels among the mountains here."

"Traveling for pleasure?"

The man laughed.

"No," he responded, "it was to a large extent on business. We stopped over a few days at Vancouver to investigate some mining matters."

Brough decided that one of them must be acting for a certain London financial syndicate, so he led them into conversation about the leading mines in the province, until he discovered that his suspicions were correct.

In the meanwhile the great locomotive, panting heavily up the climbing track, hauled the long train farther into the great rift in the serried ranges through which already the tide of commerce swings to and fro between East and West. Ahead, peak seemed piled on peak, with a hollow of awful profundity clean cleft between. Above, so high that the strangers could scarcely see them as they sat, majestic rock ramparts cut the blue of the sky, and in between the pines rolled down, growing from a tiny green filigree etched upon the towering slopes to huge and stately colonnades as they neared the winding track. Then they fell again, almost sheer to the edge of the rift, out of which the river's hoarse turmoil rose from very far below.

In places the clanging cars swept through their shadow, in others they sped across bare, stone-strewn slopes, and rushed with a mad roar and rattle over openwork wooden trestles, while at every mile the kaleidoscopic changes of rock and flood and forest be-

wildered the wondering eye with fresh combinations of almost unearthly grandeur.

By and by another man strolled into the car with a newspaper in his hand and sat down opposite Brough.

"I saw you get in at Vancouver," he said, and glanced at the paper. "Doesn't seem to be anything in particular going on. They evidently haven't found that mysterious Englishman yet."

"What Englishman?" asked Brough.

The man laughed.

"Then you haven't seen the notice that has been appearing for about a month? There's a reward of a hundred dollars offered for proof of his death."

He doubled back the paper and handed it to Brough, who read the passage he indicated and then looked up.

"Something at the back of it, of course. It sounds rather curious," Brough commented. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Not much," admitted his companion. "I read an account of the thing soon after the man was supposed to have been killed on the range."

"Carteret is not a common name in the Province," Brough said thoughtfully. "Could it have been any relative of our mutual acquaintance?"

"I can't say. The address, as you will notice, is a lawyer's, but Carteret came from the old country originally."

"Yes," assented Brough, "I have heard that once or twice. I suppose you have no idea as to whether he was expecting any of his relations from the other side to visit him?"

"Now that you mention it, I remember Simcoe told me that he was going to the Carteret place in the bush for some fishing, and I have a hazy notion that he said Carteret would have several other guests there because he wanted to make it more lively for somebody who

was coming over. I'm not very clear about the matter, however. It didn't concern me."

Brough carefully turned this information over in his mind. He was aware that a block of Long Divide shares was held by a man in England named Carteret, whom he naturally supposed to be a relative of his opponent. What was more to the purpose, the latter hitherto had been supported by the English proxies, and there was no doubt that they would be of no small assistance to him at the next stockholders' meeting.

"Anyway, this Englishman is supposed to have been killed?" he inquired with no great show of interest.

"They don't seem very sure of it or they wouldn't offer a reward for proof of his death. As I mentioned, there was an account of the accident in the paper some time ago. This is how it went, as far as I can recollect."

Brough listened with an air of forbearance, but he did not miss a word of what his companion said.

"If the Indian's story is reliable there doesn't seem to be much room for doubt," he commented. "On the other hand, there's one difficulty. What has become of the third man? It strikes one as strange that he shouldn't have turned up at one of the settlements."

"That's rather more than I can tell you," his companion admitted. "He seems to have disappeared." Then he stood up as the cars went clanging across a bridge. "I didn't think we had got quite so far, and I've a wire or two to send on at the next stop. I'll go back and attend to it."

He strolled away, and Brough lighted another cigar and began to think. He had noticed that one of the English travelers, who sat just across the aisle up the middle of the car, seemed to have been listening to his companion's story, but he did not trouble about that matter now. First of all, there was the

fact that Carteret would certainly be anxious to secure the proxies for the English stock held by a man of his name, and after that the information that he had expected a visit from an English relative. There was no proof that the latter was the same person, but the thing seemed probable. Then a man named Carteret had apparently been killed among the ranges, and somebody was desirous of securing proof of his death. If this was the man who had come out from England that somebody might reasonably be assumed to be Carteret, for he would have sufficient cause for the wish.

Considering the matter a little more closely, and taking it for granted that one of the men had actually been killed, it occurred to him that there was only the fact that a shooting diary with a name on it had been found near the scene of the accident to establish his identity, which after all did not seem very conclusive. This led him a little further, and he admitted the possibility of Carteret's having escaped, which brought him to the question why, since there was no suggestion of foul play, the latter had not in such a case stayed to give information at one of the settlements. He was turning this point over in his mind when one of the English travelers leaned forward toward him.

"I couldn't help overhearing what your friend said," he admitted. "As it happens, I know something about a young man named Carteret who, I heard, was killed in Canada."

Brough was keenly interested.

"You were acquainted with him?"

"Not personally, although, if I am correct in my suppositions, I have met his brother. The Carterets ran a banking business, and had dealings with one or two of the financial concerns in the city—I mean London. The bank, I may perhaps mention, failed disastrously."

"Ah," observed Brough, "that seems to fit in.

Have you any objections to telling me what you know about the matter?"

"None at all; but my information came from an English paper sent on to me at Kobe," said the stranger. "The Carteret bank had evidently been unsound for several years, and I believe it was intended to prosecute the auditors and directors. One of the latter bolted, and another, Carteret, was killed immediately before the revelation. The coincidence seemed, to say the least, suspicious. Shortly afterward the other brother became involved in a fatal accident in Canada. Supposing that he had just got the news of his brother's disgrace and death, and his own ruin, the inference—unpleasant as it is—seems reasonably plain."

Brough expressed his acquiescence in this assumption, but he changed the subject shortly afterward, and he was not altogether sorry when his companions presently moved away. He had a good deal to think over, for admitting that when one desires to investigate any apparently extraordinary action it is advisable to search for a motive, he recognized that in Carteret's case the stranger had suggested the latter. If Carteret had escaped from the landslide there seemed to be a sufficient reason for his disappearance, and Brough decided that he would extend his journey and spend a night, at least, in a settlement his acquaintance had mentioned, with the object of seeking an interview with rancher Brodie, who had, it seemed, acted as Carteret's guide.

He reached it in due time, after he had finished his other business, which was connected with a mine in a not very distant valley, and it was, as it happened, a Saturday evening, when the men from the surrounding bush usually came in to purchase provisions. Brough had his six-o'clock supper with a number of them in a little frame hotel, and sat out on the veranda afterward, smoking and talking with them. They

talked to him freely, for they were interested in mineral discoveries, and most of them had, indeed, staked off what were in all probability wholly worthless claims on a stretch of outcropping rock in the shadowy bush, and it was evident that the stranger from the cities knew a good deal about the subject.

It was a still evening, and the musical clank of cowbells now and then broke through the song of a river that came up across the shadowy woods, for the dark firs closed in upon the settlement in an unbroken wall, save where the red sunset blazed through the straight-hewn gap of trail. The men, for the most part, wore long boots and blue duck. They were bronze-skinned and wiry grapplers with rock and forest—simple, strenuous men; and none of them noticed the skill with which their bland companion presently turned the conversation upon the landslide.

"It was a mighty curious thing, the hull affair," commented one of them. "What gets me is why Carteret's partner slipped out for Vancouver without saying a word to anybody. Anyway, it's quite clear that he didn't kill him. Brodie and the Siwash stick to that."

"His partner went to Vancouver then?" Brough asked languidly.

"That's where he bought his ticket to," answered another man. "I can't figure out why he did it. He'd told the boss here he was going to Okanagan to buy a ranch."

"That's a sure thing," observed the hotel-keeper, who lounged in the doorway. "According to Ton Ridgeway's tale, he didn't go to either."

"It certainly does look curious," Brough assented. "Is Ridgeway here?"

A big man who sat on the balustrade smiled at him reassuringly.

"That's me. As I've told the boys, I ran up against

that man at a station down the line. Some of them don't quite seem to believe me."

"Which man?" asked Brough, as though the matter scarcely interested him.

"Well," drawled the other, "that's what I don't quite know. He kind of put it to me that his name was Jardine, but"—and he looked at the hotel-keeper—"there wasn't no Jardine."

"Sure," said the hotel-keeper, "there was the Siwash and Brodie, Carteret and Hilton. We know where the Siwash and Brodie are, and that only leaves the other two of them."

"That's just how it was," Ridgeway added. "When I wouldn't take the Jardine he said he had three names, and perhaps I guessed it was Hilton. I said it wasn't, and he must be the one who was killed."

Brough contrived to suppress a start.

"What did he answer?"

His companion chuckled as he drawled his reply.

"He laughed kind of natural, and allowed it didn't seem a likely thing. Then he put two young women's baggage into a wagon outside the station, and I didn't see no more of him, because the train went on."

"What kind of young women were they?"

"City folks—smart at that. You could tell it by their dresses."

"One wouldn't have expected to come across city people round here. There's nothing to bring them into the bush."

"The station was way back down the line."

Nobody could have fancied that Brough was greatly interested when he heard the name of it, but he knew that it lay within a long drive of Carteret's ranch.

"Did the young women talk to him like—a friend?" he asked.

"No," replied the other, "anyway, not that I no-

ticed. By the way he was dressed, and one thing and another, he looked more like the hired man."

Brough decided to let the subject drop, or at least to permit the rest to talk of it unassisted, as they seemed inclined to do.

"It's mighty curious that Ridgeway doesn't seem to know whether he was Carteret or not," said another of them.

"Is it?" Ridgeway retorted indignantly. "How could he be Carteret if he was killed? That's how he put the thing to me. After all, it's quite likely I've got their names mixed."

"Anyway, the boys from Morland can't find either of them," the hotel-keeper broke in. "Somebody said they'd been doing quite a lot of digging."

"It's that reward," added another man. "There's a hundred dollars down for any one who proves Carteret dead. Say"—and the speaker turned to Brough —"do you figure Ridgeway would get anything if he told them about that man at the station?"

Brough thought rather hard for a moment or two. He was almost sure that it was Carteret from England who had escaped and was then employed at his Canadian relative's ranch. The thing did not seem very probable at first sight, but on more careful scrutiny the information he had gathered bore out the supposition. The next question was, Did the Canadian Carteret know who his hired man was? And though Brough admitted that this was possible, he immediately decided to answer it in the negative. In either case he felt that it would not be advisable to have any of these ranchers taking a hand in the elucidation of the matter.

"No," he said, "in my opinion he would only be wasting time. In a general way, when people want proof that a man is dead, it's because they're anxious to get hold of his property. That being so, it's most unlikely that they'd pay Ridgeway anything, even if he

could make it quite clear that the man he met was Carteret, and he would probably have some trouble in doing it."

He saw that they could follow this train of reasoning and appreciate it, and Ridgeway made it evident that he intended to let the matter drop.

"Well," he declared, "there's sense in that. I guess I'm not going to worry about the thing."

Then they set off homeward or strolled away up the unpaved street of the settlement by twos and threes, leaving Brough sitting on the veranda alone. He remained there until the white mist from the river rolled up among the climbing pines and the great hills grew black and shadowy; but he had arrived at a decision when he rose and went into the hotel. In the first place, it was necessary to make quite sure that Carteret was unaware of his hired man's identity, and if this proved to be the case the latter must be got away from the ranch as soon as possible. There was, Brough realized, a certain danger of his accidentally betraying his real name or exciting Carteret's suspicions if he remained at it. Then it would make things more secure if he could be sent to some place where it was unlikely that he could hear anything of the stockholders' meeting until it was over. Brough, who fancied he saw how this could be brought about, presently joined the hotel-keeper and made a few judicious inquiries concerning rancher Brodie. He was, on the whole, distinctly pleased with what he had done, when he resumed his journey, for he had then roughly formulated what seemed to be a workable scheme.

CHAPTER XXI

A PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY

IT was a hot morning, and fierce sunshine streamed down into the clearing. Sydney, who had been mowing timothy hay, stopped and proceeded to hammer up a bolt in the lower handle of his scythe with a stone. The handle worked loose and turned round every now and then, but he was, on the whole, rather glad that it did, as it supplied him with an excuse for resting a minute or two. He had turned out at sunrise that morning to get as much as possible done while the dew was on the grass. He had discovered that the scythe cuts cleanest then.

He was not an adept at mowing, which takes time to learn, and after four or five hours he felt that he had had quite enough of it and would have been content to lounge about for the rest of the day. Until a few months ago he had never, as far as he could remember, forced himself to persist in any arduous occupation in spite of aching muscles and crippling weariness, unless, perhaps, it was a game, and one does not begin a game at sunrise and keep it up until night comes round again. The work was difficult and the result of it small, for the clearing was studded with fir-stumps with projecting roots which formed a harbor for the fern, and when he essayed to cut the latter the scythe stuck into them. Then more fern and young willows grew up among the timothy, and he had to pick

them out laboriously, stooping low, with the sun on his neck and back. There was, it seemed to him, a great deal of fern and very little hay. Besides, he had reasons for believing that he might, after all, be throwing his toil away, which was a disheartening possibility.

When he had put the scythe handle right, and incidentally hit one of his fingers with the stone, he hurled the latter into the forest, and taking a letter out of a pocket of his jacket, which lay close by, sat down on a row of hay. His face was beaded with perspiration, his wrists were aching, and there was a good deal of thin red dust on his blue shirt and duck trousers. It occurred to him that it would be delightful to go down to the lake for a swim, but this, like a good many other pleasant things, was out of the question. He would have liked an iced drink, for instance, mixed as his deft favorite waiter had prepared it at a certain London club; and in order to save lighting the stove his breakfast beverage that morning had consisted of very inferior cold coffee left over from the previous day.

At length he opened the letter, which he had read and worried over once or twice already. It was from the man who had sold him the ranch, and it stated that he would be glad to have the money still owing him for the few head of stock which Sydney had taken over. He had paid for the ranch, but Jackson, its former proprietor, had agreed to wait for the rest at a rather high interest, though he reserved the right to call up the money at any time, in which case, as Brodie had pointed out, Sydney could obtain it by selling off the stock. Neither of them had, however, remembered that if he did so his means of obtaining a livelihood would be gone. Besides this, the trail-cutters had shot one beast, and he had failed to sell all the meat, while another had been drowned in a

foaming rapid. Sydney set his lips as he reread the intimation, but there was apparently no way out of the difficulty. Jackson asked for the money and it must be sent him.

He had, however, replaced the letter in his pocket, and was gazing across the clearing with moody eyes, when Haines walked out of the bush and leaned on a fir-stump a few yards away.

"You don't look happy this morning," he observed.

"I'm not, as a matter of fact," replied Sydney. "I have to make a payment which I didn't expect I'd have to face for, perhaps, another year. As I don't know how I'm going to do it, the thing's worrying me."

Haines smiled.

"I've met people who wouldn't have let that trouble them, and, as far as my experience goes, they're not the exceptions. Still, no doubt, it's a situation to which one has to get accustomed."

"You have been in it?"

"No," answered Haines, somewhat grimly. "What I said was based on the conduct of my clients. Nobody would trust me when I first put up my shingle. I lived in the back office on crackers and chocolate. You can get a good many crackers for a dollar—but I've never touched one since." He paused a moment. "You're anxious about it?"

"If I could come across anybody who would give me three or four dollars a day for the next few months I'd feel a good deal easier," admitted Sydney.

"It might be managed. In fact, I came across to ask if you would reconsider your decision. You see, I'm going away in a day or two."

"You're going away?"

"Yes," said Haines; "Simcoe and two of the young ladies are going too. I understand that Miss Brattan will be the only guest at the ranch before the week is up."

Sydney was far from pleased to hear it, for the fact that Carteret would be less likely to require him so often now promised to increase his difficulties. Then Haines spoke again.

"Well," he asked, "are you open to come back down Puget Sound with me?"

Sydney did not answer immediately. He lay, with one elbow buried in the hay, gazing across the clearing. It was flooded with bright sunshine, but the great black firs rose round it, shadowy and very still, and he felt that they called to him. They were the guardians of the wilderness, the van of the great host that rolled back, massing their ranks in every valley, and flinging out straggling skirmishers high up the snow-swept mountain spurs, across vast leagues of desolation toward the frozen north; and just then the sight of them stirred his blood. Little by little a love for the wild and rugged land had grown on him, as it is very apt to do on the strong of arm and stout of heart, for men have now and then dimly splendid visions of the future in that country, and the slow and stubborn struggle with the wilderness, which alone makes the realization possible, appeals to them.

It is clear to most of them, though they are signally slow to admit it, that their forest-girt ranches will never yield them more than the scantiest sustenance at the cost of ceaseless toil, but many—and there are men of careful upbringing among them—could not be induced to leave them for a princely salary. Knowing that the harvest can scarcely be in their day, they work on, hewing back the clearing slowly, acre by acre, from pride in the effort and the love of the thing. There are others of a different type, the free-lances, who cannot be held by the cities but gather where there is rock and icy water to be grappled with at the branch line railroad, or a new wagon road to be blasted out up some high divide, and it is not the wages

they squander freely that counts for most with them. It is the smell of the hewn-down redwoods, the red glare of the cooking fires blazing in the desolation beside the pegged-out track, the untrammeled life, and the half-instinctive delight in the work that man was first set to do, for before she will nourish him here he must set his foot upon the neck of beaten nature. These, too, are building up a wondrous future, and no stroke of their axes or clash of hammer-head on drill is thrown away.

Sydney Carteret, resting on his elbow among the timothy hay, had, like most of them, a vague, half-formulated perception that he had taken up a task that was worth the doing. At least, the resinous sweetness of the firs and the far-off roar of water that throbbed across the forest reacted upon him, and he shrank from that other struggle in the close-packed cities. In the bush a man held his head high, seeking nobody's favor, cringing to none, but took his own with ax and saw, by right of toil and unyielding will. He could, he knew, ply the shovel, but, though the Carterets had been bankers, to drive a bargain by force or guile was, he felt, quite another and, from his point of view, a less pleasant thing.

"No," he said at length, "though it's difficult to tell you why, I can't go. In the bush or on the ranges there are things that I can do. We'll let it go at that. I'm much obliged to you."

Haines smiled.

"Well," he responded, "I guess you can't help it. I've struck men of your kind working up to their waists in a creek that was flooded with melting snow, with, as far as I could see, every probability of having all that they had done merely thrown away, and some more camped out just below the timber line on a frozen mineral claim they'd never make day wages out of. I couldn't have hired them to chop clear a building

lot near the cities." He paused and spread out one hand. "No doubt it all depends on how you look at it. The thing seems foolishness to me."

"We have been over the ground once already," Sydney reminded him. "I don't think my feelings, and that's about all I can call them, have altered much since then."

Haines changed the subject, and presently strolled away, and Sydney resumed his mowing. He knew that it was in one sense an unwise decision he had reached; but, as Haines suggested, he had yielded to an impulse that sprang from the depths of his nature and was stronger than his reason or his conscious will. He had chosen discomfort, constant self-denial and toil; but he felt that he would not regret it, as he worked through the headed timothy with aching back, swinging the flashing scythe. After all, it was in many ways a good life and a wholesome one he led in the shadowy bush, and—for the man was sanguine—there was always the possibility that something would turn up.

It was evening before he hung the scythe in its place outside his house and walked across to the ranch to split stovewood. Brough, who had arrived a little earlier, was sitting with Carteret in the latter's room just then. The window was open wide, and Brough sat where he could look out into the clearing. He was explaining the reason for his visit.

"I'm afraid it's going to be useless, but as I'd been up in the ranges on some business connected with a mineral property I broke my journey to see if there were any possibility of your meeting us, after all," he said. "I have given the matter a good deal of thought since I saw you, and the liquidation of Long Divide still seems imperatively necessary."

"You appeared quite convinced of it then," returned Carteret, with a smile.

Brough admitted it.

"The point is that I have reason for believing most of the stockholders agree with me," he added. "I'm just making a last attempt to disarm your opposition. I feel that, if it's any way possible, we must make you see the thing as we do. It would, of course, save me a good deal of trouble."

Carteret laughed. He was not, as a rule, easily convinced, and he distrusted his companion, but because the man was his guest he again went over arguments they had already used; and after some while the two were as far as ever from any compromise or agreement. Then Brough made a sign of weariness.

"Well," he said, "as there's no other way out, we'll have to leave the stockholders to decide it."

He leaned back in his chair, and, as it happened, fortune favored him, for Sydney walked into the clearing just then carrying an ax. Brough turned to his companion.

"Then you keep a hired man?"

"Not exactly," replied Carteret. "I pay him a few dollars to come around when he's wanted and split stovewood."

"English, isn't he?" remarked Brough, casually. "What do you call him?"

"Jardine."

The sunlight was still upon the clearing, and Brough watched Sydney closely. Though the latter wore soil-stained blue duck there was something about him that suggested that he had not been very long in the bush. For one thing, he had not acquired the bush rancher's rather curious gait, for the man who plods through tangled fern and undergrowth lifts his feet unusually high. Then, as he glanced toward the house, Brough had a clear view of his face, and that decided him that this young man had once been accustomed to the smoother side of life.

"It's curious that a man of his kind didn't make

for the cities," he commented. "Where did you get him?"

"He bought a little ranch close by shortly after we came up here. I hired the man who had it before him now and then, and when I explained this to him he seemed willing to continue the arrangement."

"Then you know nothing about him?"

"No," said Carteret, "nothing at all. There was no reason why I should be curious about the man."

Brough had cast a swift glance at him and he decided that he could believe this, for he had seen nothing to suggest that his companion was on his guard. He, however, felt practically sure that this rancher was Carteret's relative, and that, being so, it was highly desirable that he should be removed from the vicinity as soon as possible.

"Of course!" he assented. "As it happens, I was struck by his appearance. Anyway, I must get the morning train down to Vancouver, and as it's quite a while since I was in the saddle I had about enough of riding coming in over the trail. I wonder if you could let me have a team?"

"Certainly," responded Carteret. "If you won't stay the night with us I'll ask the man you saw to drive you in."

Brough showed no sign of satisfaction, though this was what he had desired, and it further proved the fact that his host had no suspicion as to the identity of his hired man, for it seemed clear that he would not have suggested sending him off in his opponent's company had he guessed that he was the holder of the Carteret shares.

"Thank you. If he doesn't mind being up all night it would save me a ride I'm anxious to avoid."

Half an hour later Sydney brought the team up to the veranda steps; and he had driven Brough for several miles over a very rough trail when the latter

began to talk of ranching. He showed some knowledge of the financial side of the subject.

"You have a small place somewhere in this neighborhood, haven't you?" he said by and by. "Do you see any great probability of making it pay?"

"Not for a while," answered Sydney, somewhat ruefully. "I wish I did."

"The small man's usual trouble?" Brough suggested. "You can't lay out sufficient money to clear a big patch for oats and timothy. As the result you can't raise feed for more than a few head of stock?"

"Yes," assented Sydney, "that's very much how I'm situated. The great difficulty is that if you leave the place to earn a few dollars it naturally prevents your doing much chopping."

"That's quite plain," said Brough. "Still, you get a little from Carteret now and then?"

Sydney could see no reason for reticence. His companion seemed sympathetic, and there was nothing in his manner that one could resent.

"I'm afraid that will stop very soon," he answered. "Carteret's guests are going away, and my business was to look after them."

"Then you'll have to strike for the railroad if there's any bridge-building or track-strengthening to be done, or one of the logging camps?"

Sydney said this was what he contemplated doing, and his companion appeared to consider.

"Well," he finally said, "I know of a mine back in the ranges where they're putting up a dam to supply their new flume." He fumbled in his pocket, and taking out an envelope scribbled an address across the back of it. "If you wrote to them, or took them this and said that I sent you, I've no doubt they'd put you on."

"Thank you," responded Sydney. "When I leave Carteret I'll probably go up there."

It scarcely seemed to Brough that there was any hazard in what he had done. He decided that in all probability his companion would not mention to his employer the suggestion he had made, and there was, after all, nothing to arouse the latter's suspicions if he did. It was, he admitted, possible that if Carteret chanced to discover his hired man's identity after the stockholders' meeting he would see through the thing; but then the battle would be over and it would not matter. There was just another point he wished to elucidate.

"Did you ever come across a rancher named Brodie?" he asked, and was satisfied when he saw Sydney's start.

"Yes," replied the latter, "I spent a week or two with him some time ago."

"Then if you go up to the mine you'll have company. Brodie's said to be quite smart at bush clearing and rough dam building, and I believe the people yonder have written to him about a small contract for something of that kind."

Sydney said he was pleased to hear it, and his companion changed the subject. He had, he fancied, accomplished his purpose, which was to get Carteret's English relative and the other man, who must in all probability have had some hand in effecting his disappearance, away to an isolated mine. It lay well back from the railroad, and he felt that if anything that might interest young Carteret arose they would be very unlikely to hear of it in that remote spot.

CHAPTER XXII

SYDNEY PROVES OBDURATE

A FEW days had slipped by since Brough's visit to the ranch. Sydney, longing for supper-time as he glanced at the lengthening shadows beneath the western firs, plodded across his clearing beside his oxen. They were hauling a jumper sled piled high with timothy along the breast of a slope that was considerably steeper than he liked, and the gravel in the thin red soil grated harshly under the unshod runners. The great mound of yellow grass that overhung them seemed to blaze with light, and the man's eyes were smarting with the irritating dust. It was very hot just then, and the perspiration dripped from him, while the beasts were pursued by a black cloud of flies.

He had been at work since six that morning, hauling the timothy to his barn and laboriously pitching it up on to the growing pile inside. Because the rude log structure was very small it was necessary to clamber up to the top of the mass every now and then and trample it down; and as each load brought him nearer the confined space beneath the shingle roof the heat became almost unsupportable and the dust blinding. He had persevered stubbornly, although he could see no logical reason for doing so, for as the stock must be sold off there seemed to be very little probability of his ever requiring the provender he was garnering. It had been grown, however, and he felt that he could not

leave it out to rot in the field, while the strain on his physical powers kept him from thinking. He scarcely cared to contemplate the fact that he must leave the ranch while Clare was staying there.

In the meanwhile he tapped the oxen with a long, pointed stick, guiding them cautiously as they plodded along the uneven slope. Suddenly one side of the jumper tilted up. Sydney shouted and rapped one beast upon the neck; but it did not respond quite fast enough, and the next moment there was a soft thud and a crash, and most of the yellow timothy was flung broadcast down the declivity. The jumper lay upon one side, with the bottom of it lifted up and half the stout poles which had held its load in place broken off; and the ponderous beasts, which had been rudely dragged backward by the jerk on the chain, stood blowing through their nostrils while they gazed at him with startled eyes.

Sydney's face hardened as he glanced at the overturned load, for it was clear to him that he could not right the jumper until it was almost empty, and then it would probably cost him half an hour's arduous labor to pitch the hay up again. First of all, however, he would have to cut new framing poles to replace the broken ones, and that would entail the chopping down of several small firs in order to obtain their straight, thin tops. He was already unpleasantly weary, and sitting down in the shadow of the tilted jumper he took out his pipe and lighted it, though he recognized the hazard attached to this. He did not wish to burn his hay, but he felt that there would be a certain satisfaction in seeing it blaze just then. This was, of course, illogical, but the sensation was, on the other hand, not an altogether unnatural one. He remembered having once seen a man engaged in what appeared to be some baffling work on a railroad trestle stop and violently hurl his hammer into the gorge

below. Sydney had smiled then, but he could sympathize with that workman now.

After a while, however, he heard the rustle of a light dress, and glancing around saw Clare, who appeared from behind the jumper, stop a yard or two away. She looked very cool and dainty in her immaculate white attire, and he became uneasily conscious that his face was wet and flushed, and that he was covered all over with fine red soil. It stuck to and smeared his wet hands when he attempted to brush some of it off as he stood up.

"You may sit down again," she smiled. "I'll stay a few minutes. There's a little shadow here."

Sydney raked up an armful or two of hay to make a seat for her, but the dust rose out of it in a cloud, and he glanced at the latter disgustedly.

"I really don't think that's very much better," he said. "One can't get away from this dust anywhere."

Clare waited until it had dissipated, and then sat down, while he casually laid aside his pipe.

"You don't seem afraid that the hay'll catch fire."

A twinkle crept into Sydney's eyes.

"A few minutes ago I almost felt that I wished it would."

"It's a pity you upset it," Clare laughingly sympathized.

"I should like to point out that it was Farragut that did that. Any one acquainted with his habits would have suspected it from his look of contemplative innocence."

"You have a good deal of hay," remarked Clare, glancing at the long rows of sunlit grass. "Are you going to buy more stock?"

"No," answered Sydney. "I'm afraid I shall have to part with the few I have."

The girl turned toward him sharply, for she guessed

that this was a thing he was not likely to do unless driven to it by financial necessity.

"Oh," she said, "that is unfortunate. Must you really sell them?"

"I'm afraid it can't be avoided. In any case, it won't matter quite so much, because I'm going away."

He watched her closely, and though it was very slight, there was no doubt about her momentary change of expression. It sent a little thrill through him, but she sat silent for the next moment or two.

"Why is that?" she asked at length.

"For one thing, it's scarcely likely that your father will want to keep me. Now that all your friends except Miss Brattan have gone, there will be very little for me to do. I understand that you are both rather tired of fishing. Anyway, you haven't been out for a week, at least."

"The first question is, Do you wish to go?"

"No," answered Sydney, a little too quickly and decidedly, "there's no doubt on that point. The trouble is that I can't help it."

"Then why is it necessary for you to go away?"

It occurred to Sydney, who fancied there was a faint suggestion of constraint in her manner, that it was possibly significant that she had not asked him why he wished to stay, which would have been more embarrassing, for he could, at least, answer the question she had put—that was, if she insisted on it.

"There's really no reason why I should trouble you with my affairs."

Clare's glance was mildly reproachful.

"Have any of us given you cause to believe that we would be quite indifferent to your misfortunes?"

"My misfortunes?"

"That's what it really comes to, isn't it?"

Sydney made a little rueful gesture of assent.

"We will call them perplexities; and, if you must

have an answer, I must earn enough somehow between now and the winter to keep me until the spring comes round. That's why I shall have to strike out for one of the logging or mining camps."

"And in the meanwhile the fern will creep all over the clearing, and the willows grow up in the slashing. It will take you months to get the place straight again."

"Yes," admitted Sydney. "I quite expect something of that kind."

The girl sat still, quietly watching him for a moment or two before she spoke again.

"What my father pays you would be—just enough—to keep you on the ranch?"

"Yes," assented Sydney, reluctantly. "As I pointed out, the difficulty is that he won't require me."

"Has he told you that?"

"No," replied Sydney, with a faint flush in his face. "I may be wrong, but I fancy he would rather I raised the question, or, perhaps, because he is a generous man, it's possible that he would prefer me to leave it alone altogether."

"Then why can't you do the latter?"

The blood showed more clearly in Sydney's forehead.

"It's a rather difficult question, but you could hardly expect me to remain here a pensioner on your father's bounty, pretending to do things that needn't be done at all."

"There are a few things that really should be done."

"Then they don't seem to have occurred to my employer." He looked up sharply. "Why should you take the trouble to suggest them to him? Can't you imagine that it's singularly unpleasant to feel oneself the recipient of charity?"

Clare made a sign of comprehension.

"If you look at it in that way, perhaps I was wrong—and if you feel hurt about it I am sorry."

There was silence for a little after that, and Sydney wondered greatly whether she had been actuated by any desire to keep him near her, or by sympathy alone. He felt that he could, at least, be sure of the latter, and he laid a rather stern restraint upon himself.

"Suppose my father asks you to stay on, spontaneously and without—anybody else's—suggesting it?" she said at length.

Sydney smiled, though it cost him an effort.

"I should say 'Thank you'; but I'm afraid it wouldn't convince me that I ought to remain."

The girl rose, but her eyes rested on him for a moment, and he felt that she was rather compelled than willing to agree with his decision. He could not tell exactly what conveyed this impression, but he seemed able to read her nature clearly then, and he knew that he was not mistaken. It was a difficult matter to preserve an outward stolidity of manner when he got upon his feet, and he overdid it.

"Then," she answered slowly, "there is nothing more to be said. I must join Mrs. Graham and Lucy, who are by the lake."

She turned away toward the shadowy trail that led into the bush, and Sydney was conscious of a faint relief, for the brief interview had been in some respects a trying one to him. He was more sure now that she had been to some extent, at least, actuated by a desire to keep him at the ranch as well as by a wish to help him out of a difficulty, but the impossibility of his staying on was evident. It had not been altogether pleasant to take Carteret's money for work actually done, and he felt that to remain living on her father's bounty would be intolerable, and, what was more, that it would degrade him in her eyes. That fact was, he fancied, not altogether apparent to her yet, though it almost seemed that she had had some perception of it during the last few moments she had spent

with him, but he knew that she would have had to admit it had he been induced to stay.

Then she disappeared among the trees, and he set to work to right the jumper before he strode into the forest with an ax in search of new poles. The sun had sunk behind the firs before he had obtained them and loaded the sled again, and he was content to lie still in a hide chair after supper that evening. It was hot and still, and as he left the door open he could see the wonderful green transparency burn above the serrated wall of forest which cut sharp against it, black as ebony. In one place only he could catch the faint glimmer of the lake, and the song of the river came up in hoarse cadence across the darkening bush. It was strangely beautiful and marvelously peaceful, and he knew that nothing which could befall him would ever quite obliterate the memory of the summer he had spent in those still woods.

He retired early, and soon after breakfast the next morning quietly walked into Carteret's room. His employer laid down his paper and looked up at him with a smile.

"We haven't seen you for several days. You have been busy at the ranch?"

"As a matter of fact, I have been rather busy, but that wasn't the only thing that kept me away," explained Sydney. "Now that your guests have gone, sir, you won't require me."

It struck him that his employer had not recognized this until then.

"Well," he admitted, "there will be less to do, especially as I had decided to send the team away. The trail is too rough to drive on with any pleasure. I suppose you couldn't fill up your time in the garden?"

"It would be too much like robbing you if I did," said Sydney, with a smile. "The whole clearing could

be kept reasonably straight with one or two days' work a week."

Carteret looked at him sharply.

"You prefer to earn your money?"

"Yes, sir," replied Sydney, who was off his guard. "In this case, anyway. Beyond that, I don't quite know how far the feeling would carry me."

His companion smiled.

"Though it's perhaps not a very common one, I can grasp your point of view. Is there any way in which I can be of service to you?"

"Thank you," responded Sydney, "I scarcely think there is. I believe I know of an opening at a mine in the ranges."

Carteret appeared to reflect.

"Well," he said, "I have no doubt I can get a man to come over from the settlement for a day or two occasionally, and you will in all probability get more for regular work at a mine than I have been paying you. Still, there was one remark of yours I didn't quite understand. You said you preferred to earn your money, but something suggested that you meant in this case—particularly."

It was precisely what Sydney had meant, and he was troubled with a very embarrassing sense of confusion.

"I'm sorry I expressed myself as I did, sir," he apologized. "It's a little difficult to get hold of the right word now and then."

Carteret's expression remained good-humored.

"It certainly is," he assented. "Still, I feel inclined to wonder why you should be so especially unwilling to accept a small favor from me."

It was a point upon which Sydney, whose embarrassment was increasing, had no intention of enlightening him.

"Is there any reason why you should go out of

your way to bestow one, sir?" he asked. "I should like to say that you already have treated me better than I could have expected."

"No," answered his employer, somewhat dryly, "I don't suppose there is. We'll let it go at that. When do you think of starting for the mine?"

"As soon as I can get the hay in, but I'll split you a week or two's supply of stovewood before I go."

Carteret said that he would be content with this; and, soon after Sydney left him, he strolled out on the veranda, where Mrs. Graham was sitting.

"We are going to lose Jardine shortly," he informed her.

"Why?"

Carteret looked thoughtful.

"For one thing, there will not be much for him to do now. It occurred to me as slightly curious, however, that he should point this out, though it's quite possible that the higher wages he'll probably get at the mine he's going to will count for something. Anyway, I'm a little sorry about the thing, as I rather like the man."

As it happened, Clare crossed the clearing just then, and Mrs. Graham's glance rested on her for a moment before she answered.

"After all," she said reflectively, "perhaps you would better let him go."

She fancied that Carteret had not noticed Clare, who disappeared among the trees, and though he favored her with a sharp glance, he asked no questions, which was on the whole a relief to her. She went into the house and left him before he said anything further.

Three or four days later, Sydney, who had arranged to take back the team Carteret had hired, left the ranch. His employer and Mrs. Graham gave him their good wishes and shook hands with him on part-

ing, and as he was about to drive out of the clearing he had a word or two with Lucy Brattan.

"We shall not forget you—and the fishing," she said. "If you are in Vancouver at any time you will come and see us?"

"If the change I once spoke of ever arrives I will certainly come," answered Sydney, holding in the impatient team.

"In that case only?" asked Lucy, with a smile. "Can't you realize that you are not in England still, Mr. Carteret? The invitation stands whether the change arrives or not."

"Thank you," said Sydney, with a little show of feeling which he did not altogether understand. "After all, if I am in Vancouver I think I will come, in any case." He paused, and added in a lower voice, "You have helped to make things considerably pleasanter to me than they might have been."

Then he started the team, and Lucy stood still a minute, watching him drive away, before she turned and went back to the house with a little wistful smile.

In the meanwhile Sydney was conscious of a keen disappointment. They had all given him a kindly send-off with the exception of Clare, but he had seen nothing of her since that morning, and she had not bidden him good-by then. He had, however, not left the clearing far behind when he fancied he caught the gleam of a light dress in the shadow of the firs, and then the blood surged into his face as Clare stepped out into the trail. He pulled the team up suddenly, and had swung himself down before he quite realized that this was, perhaps, a trifle superfluous, and that it might have appeared more fitting had he kept his place.

"So you are actually going?" she said quietly.

Sydney cast a quick glance at her. She was very

composed, but he felt, without knowing exactly why, that she was sorry.

"Yes," he replied. "I'm glad I met you. I shouldn't have liked to drive away without saying good-by."

There was nothing to suggest that she had waited for him purposely away from the house, but he was almost sure that she had done so, and was conscious that his heart was beating unusually fast.

"Will you be long in the ranges?" she asked.

"Until the winter stops work, if they will keep me, I expect."

"Then we shall have gone back to the city before you come home again."

There was a tone of regret in Clare's voice that sent a thrill through him. He leaned against the carriage wheel, looking at her for a moment or two with an uncalled-for and not altogether tactful steadiness. The sunlight that pierced the scented shadow here and there fell upon her pale-tinted dress and made it blaze with brightness. It also called up curiously luminous gleams from the waves of hair that showed beneath the brim of the big white hat. Her pose was unusually quiet, but the man felt that her calm, though very gracious, was a little too marked. For the rest, she was tall and shapely, and he was sure that he had seen no woman's face to compare with hers.

He suddenly felt overwhelmingly drawn to her. It was borne in upon him that he might be driven to some act of insensate folly in another moment or two, and he struggled hard to hold himself in hand. Then he felt that she expected him to say something, and that he could not drive away with only a casual word.

"Miss Brattan graciously gave me permission to call on her there," he said. "I wonder whether you would go so far as that?"

"So far!" exclaimed Clare, with a slight straightening of her brows. "Lucy would never let you feel that

in inviting you to call she was making a concession. Can't you realize that we—I, if you prefer it—would be hurt if you imagined that in doing anything of the kind we were conferring a favor?"

"It would be a favor," Sydney assured her gravely.

"Then come—if you wish it."

Sydney was conscious that the last words were meant as a question, or, at least, as permission to say what was in his mind.

"Miss Carteret," he answered slowly, "as I told Miss Brattan, I have a certain vague expectation that something will happen—something that may, perhaps, make a change in my fortunes."

"Why did you tell Lucy that?" Clare asked sharply.

"Because I promised to call on her in Vancouver—if the change came about. She graciously said I was to come whether it did or not." He paused and looked at her steadily. "That, however, is a thing that I could not do in—your case."

A faint warmth crept into his companion's cheek and he noticed that she did not ask why he had made a distinction between her and Lucy.

"Ah," she murmured, "then you really expect that change to arrive?"

"I can't be sure. Perhaps I'm oversanguine—but it's easy to believe in the thing you wish for."

"And if it does?"

There was a tension in the girl's voice that made it clear that she expected candor from him.

"Then," he declared, "I would certainly come to Vancouver if there were no trail or railroad in the province, and I had to cross every snow-barred range on foot to get there."

Clare smiled, but there was a curious softness in her eyes.

"Well," she said, "fortune may, perhaps, favor you, and if it doesn't, you need not let that fact have

any undue weight. It certainly needn't prevent you from coming to see us. At least, you have my good wishes."

She held out her hand. Sydney retained it a moment longer than was necessary and then swung himself into the carriage and started the team. They were fresh and went up the trail at a gallop, and it was a long while before he made any attempt to restrain them.

CHAPTER XXIII

BRODIE'S DAM

AS the sun was dipping behind the firs which crested the hillside to the west of him, Sydney, carrying on his shoulders two brown blankets with his spare clothing rolled up in them, limped wearily into sight of the mine. Trains are infrequent in that country, and local fares are high, and after leaving the main line to the Rockies and Montreal he had spent one day plodding along a branch track under a blazing sun. During the first hour or two of the journey he had endeavored to step on the ties, and had generally succeeded, though they were awkwardly spaced apart; but at length his eyes had grown confused with measuring the distance, and he had abandoned the attempt. After that he plodded doggedly over the ballast, which consisted of large loose shingle that rolled beneath his feet and galled them until they bled.

There was, however, no other road, and the forest through which the line wound was cumbered with fallen logs and choked with underbrush and fern, while the tall trestles at least afforded a means of crossing the numerous ravines, though it requires a steady eye and sound nerves to walk along a western railroad trestle. Leaving the track at length, he spent two days on the trail, which led him up a deep, rock-walled valley, until at last he saw two or three iron-roofed log buildings and a great pile of débris in a gap in the

forest above him. By this time he could scarcely straighten his shoulders, which the pack-straps had rubbed raw, and he winced each time he set a foot on the ground; but he had, and he smiled grimly as he thought of it, saved a few dollars, which was a consideration.

A very simple calculation had convinced him that in view of the cost of provisions, which are not cheap in the bush, he could not remain on his ranch during the winter unless he could earn a reasonable rate of wages in the meanwhile. This, indeed, seemed imperative, as he had been told that, although the winter is not very rigorous in most of the Mountain Province, a good many of the open-air occupations of its inhabitants are more or less suspended while it lasts. He was the owner of a considerable block of mining shares, but even if they had been marketable, which was not the case, nothing would have induced him to part with them just then.

Supper was being served in one of the buildings, which was evidently used as sleeping-quarters, when he reached the mine, and when he stood in the doorway, the bare-armed, soil-stained men who lined the long table hailed him to come in and sit down with them. Sydney, however, had just walked out of the cool, clean-smelling shadow of the bush, and the low-roofed, log-walled shed seemed insufferably hot and reeked with stale tobacco smoke and the odors of cookery. This he supposed was a state of things to which he would have to get accustomed, but just then he was worn out and scarcely felt equal to the effort. Besides, he had a few provisions left, and it would not cost him much trouble to make a fire in the bush. He asked for the man in charge of the mine, and one of them directed him to a little iron-roofed building not far away.

A man, dressed very much like the others, and then

engaged in laying a number of sticks of giant-powder in a case, looked up when he entered, and listened while Sydney explained his errand.

"Yes," he said, "if your name's Jardine I'll put you on. You can handle the drill?"

Sydney admitted that he was not very proficient at it, which was more than the average Westerner would have done, even if he would have failed to recognize the implement had one been laid before him. The man broke into a dry smile.

"I guess you can manage an ox-team, anyway," he suggested. "In that case we'll pay you"—and the terms were higher than Sydney expected—"for hauling broken rock in to the dam; but you'll have to keep the man who's building it supplied."

Sydney said he would try it, and his companion nodded.

"Well," he added, "you can live in the shack with the boys, and we'll charge you usual rate for board, or you can camp with the man at the dam. Anyway, you'd better go along and tell him you have arrived."

He signified by a gesture that the interview was over, and Sydney, somewhat surprised that he had been engaged so readily, plodded away up a very rough trail, which he supposed led to the dam. Masses of rock cropped up in places, and the firs which had lately been hewn clear of it lay piled on either side. He plodded along wearily for what seemed to be an interminable way, and then it was with vast relief that he saw a wisp of blue smoke drawn out across a little opening in the forest, and Brodie sitting beside a fire in front of a tent. The latter strode forward with a smile on his bronzed face, and held out a hard hand.

"Come right along and we'll have supper before we talk," he welcomed.

Sydney was ready for the meal, which consisted of fried pork, flapjacks made in the greasy pan, strong

green tea, and a bowl of desiccated fruit stewed down. After it was over, and he had helped Brodie to wash the plates, he stretched himself out contentedly beneath a cedar, and looked about him when he had lighted his pipe.

The forest broke off and gave place to a bare slope of loose stones and gravel, through the midst of which a creek came flashing down not far away. There was an excavated hollow near the water, and a heavy timber framing, into which some stones had been fitted, stretched across one edge of it. Brodie pointed to the trail leading into the hollow.

"That's where their flume will go down," he explained. "I've taken a contract to put up the dam. There's the first of it yonder. They break out the stone and haul it in to me."

"I understand that's to be my part," said Sydney. "I didn't know you were a dam-builder."

Brodie laughed.

"It's a mighty small dam, just a pond-lead to the flume; and a rancher who has no money behind him is generally open to take a hand at anything. Anyway, I've put through one or two jobs of the kind in this district, and I guess that is why the mine boss sent for me."

He paused, and his manner became reflective.

"Still, I'm not quite clear about the thing—he made the deal so blame easy. Showed me the framing, and how high I'd have to go, and only made half a try to beat me down when he'd heard my bid. In a way, it wasn't natural. I've been sorry ever since that I didn't strike him for another dollar or two a yard."

His tone was so regretful that Sydney smiled.

"Something of the same kind occurred to me. In fact, I almost fancied that he meant to engage me whether I could do the work or not. I suppose Brough must have told him to do it."

"Brough? I don't know him—but there was a stranger—a city man—stopped at my place in the bush for dinner a week or two ago. Asked if I'd anything particular on hand just now; and I said I was open to take hold of any small contract if the price was right."

"I dare say it was the same man. I met him at Carteret's ranch, and gathered that he had an interest in the mine. As it happened, he mentioned you. Said he'd heard you had done odd work about other mineral properties."

"That's a solid fact," said Brodie. "Anyway, we're on a nice soft thing."

Then they changed the subject and talked of other matters until the air grew colder with the dew and a half-moon sailed up behind the eastern pines, when they crawled into the little tent, and in a few minutes were fast asleep.

They began work soon after sunrise the next morning, and a fortnight slipped by uneventfully with Sydney, who spent most of it plodding beside a span of oxen, hauling jumper-loads of stones over a very uneven track. He found the task sufficiently arduous, for the stones were heavy, and he was required to load them and carry them the last few yards to the dam, which the oxen could not quite reach with the sled. It was also difficult to prevent the sled from turning over, or part of its load from falling off, as it jolted along the steep hillside; and when two other men whom Brodie had hired arrived from a distant settlement, Sydney was hard-pressed to haul in the rock fast enough. He contrived to do it for the most part, however, and felt moderately content with his occupation when they desisted one lowering evening. There had been no sun that day, and when they sat at supper the range above them was wrapped in driving vapor, and now and then a few heavy drops of rain fell pattering

upon the firs. The weather had been fiercely hot for the past few weeks.

"We're going to have a change by morning, and I don't quite like the look of it," declared Brodie. "It rains mighty hard in these ranges now and then, and it wouldn't take a great deal to put that creek up. A rise of two or three feet would turn it loose on the dam, and we'd sure have trouble then."

Sydney felt inclined to agree with him, but as the light was failing, and their two companions had gone down to the miners' shanty, where they had taken up their quarters, there was nothing that could be done. He lay down on a bed of spruce twigs shortly afterward, and heard the rain patter upon the canvas as he went to sleep. When he wakened soon after daylight there was a striking change. The wet canvas had tightened, and it resounded beneath the lashing of the rain like a drum. It was a ridge-pole tent, and Sydney supposed that he must have moved a little and rolled against the fabric in his sleep, for the water was running in through one or two places splash by splash like the trickle from a partly-turned-off tap. His blankets were very wet, and there was a shallow pool in the middle of the floor.

Brodie evidently had risen earlier, for he was not in the tent, and when Sydney stood in the entrance he saw him stooping over a sulky fire which he had made between the roots of a large cedar. The pungent smoke which would not rise hung about him in a thick blue cloud, and great drops of water fell sputtering on the feeble blaze. Sydney was wet through in a few minutes after he went out, and the water was running off him when he ate his half-cooked breakfast, after which he yoked his oxen and plodded away with them for the first load of stones.

It was difficult to load them, for they were wet and splashed with mire, which afforded no hold for his

hands; and when he turned back toward the dam the beasts could scarcely keep their footing where the track led over outcrops of wet and slippery rock. It was worse where they had to cross tracts of thin soil, for the heavy sled sank in it, and every now and then the beasts strained and floundered in the churned-up slough for several minutes before they could haul it out again. Sydney realized that the day would prove a trying one. When he reached the dam he was splashed all over, and great clods of mud clung to his long boots as he stumbled with the ponderous stones in his arms across the pile of débris which lay between the jumper and the spot where his companions were working.

They toiled on, however, though, as a rule, it is difficult to get much work out of oxen during heavy rain, and Sydney's limbs were aching when he reached the dam with a scanty load in the afternoon. Brodie and his two assistants were standing waiting for him almost knee-deep in a turbid pool, and the forest behind them showed up blurred and dim through a haze of torrential rain. Brodie glanced at the jumper-load disgustedly.

"We'll run out again before you get back," he said.

"I can't help it," declared Sydney. "In fact, I feel I'm lucky in getting the beasts here at all. There's a big weight of wet soil and gravel jammed in beneath the frame of the jumper."

Brodie seemed anxious.

"If you'll heave the load off we'll carry it across. There's a piece of work I want to finish before the creek breaks in on us. The thing's not going to stand long then unless we can get a solid backing rammed in."

Sydney stood still, gasping and looking about him, when he had flung off the stones, for he felt scarcely capable of heaving the sled up to clean off the space between the frames, without a rest. He noticed that

the creek was a good deal wider than it had been in the morning, and the hoarse roar it made as it plunged down the hillside drowned the persistent patter of the rain. The whole slope about the little dam trickled with water which was fast accumulating in the excavated hollow. It was evident to him that if the creek rose another foot or two it would pour tumultuously over its boundaries and gather deep behind the dam, which would then stand alone between it and the track cut for the flume; and he scarcely fancied that the embankment would withstand the pressure long in its half-finished state. Brodie and the others, however, were already carrying the stones across the débris in furious haste; and realizing that he had very little time to stand there doing nothing, he heaved the jumper up on its side, and a few minutes later set off with it down the track. The mud seemed even deeper, and every now and then Sydney had to call encouragingly to his oxen.

During the next two or three hours he taxed his strength to the utmost, while the rain trickled in streams from his drenched clothing. At times he could hardly urge the jaded beasts up the slippery slope or compel them to drag the jumper through the clinging mire; and once or twice when he reached the dam he left them standing in the deluge, at Brodie's bidding, while he flung soil and gravel against the bank with the shovel.

The others were working deep in water now, with a tense and significant activity. It was clear that they had good cause for believing that their work must very shortly be made secure. Wet and jaded as they were, they made a grim fight of it, and when Sydney came back with another load in the early evening it almost seemed that they would win. While he was throwing the stones off, however, a curious sound fell across the dripping forest from somewhere high above. Desisting suddenly, he flung a startled glance around. Brodie

and his companions were scrambling out of the hollow behind the dam, and one of them shouted to him.

"Better run your jumper out of that!"

He pointed to the hillside, but as the slope was steep, Sydney endeavored to get rid of the last of the load before he started the oxen, and while he did it, Brodie strode toward him. The sound was rapidly increasing in volume and depth of tone.

"It means trouble, sure," said his companion. "Guess a pile of washed-out dirt and trees must have held the creek up and made a kind of pond in a hollow of the range earlier on. Now it's broke up and let a mighty big rush of water out."

Sydney could understand this. He worked on in desperate haste, and did not notice what became of Brodie when he had flung the last stones off; but as he headed for rising ground there was a roar behind him, and a flood of muddy water that suddenly swept the jumper away from him swirled up to his knees. He could scarcely keep his footing, and for a few moments the oxen were dragged backward by the floating sled. Then they stood still, straining against the stream and stolidly endeavoring to hold their ground while the water deepened about them rapidly. Somehow he managed to head them up the slope, and they floundered away together, stumbling and splashing, until at length the jumper rested on the ground again. After seeing that they were apparently safe Sydney stopped and looked back.

The dam had vanished beneath the turbid flood, out of which odd bits of the timber framing rose here and there, while the pile of débris behind it was melting rapidly, and a wide stream swirled along the track cut for the flume. Then he started the oxen, and they went on a little farther, until they were clear of the water altogether. When Brodie and the others joined him he was sitting breathless upon a fallen tree. It

was not long, however, before the water began to fall, and Brodie turned to Sydney.

"I guess you can put your oxen up," he said. "We're sure not going to want them any more to-night."

Sydney led the beasts down-hill toward the rude shelter which had been built for them near the mine, though he had some difficulty in doing it because the track was still swept by a decreasing flood. When he came back Brodie was sitting where he had left him, dejectedly regarding the wreck of his dam. Except in the excavated hollow there was not much water about it now, but parts of the timber framing had been uncovered or torn up bodily. Most of the stones had been scattered, and a great bank of wet soil and gravel had apparently been washed across those that still remained.

"There'll be mighty little money made out of this contract," he reflected. "Guess I'm going to be lucky if two weeks' work will put me where I stood half an hour ago. Anyway, we'll eat supper now." He turned to his two assistants. "You can go along, boys, and tell the boss to send up when I can have a word with him."

The men moved away down-hill, and Sydney and Brodie contrived with some difficulty to make a fire of resinous branches and prepare a meal. Then they crawled into the tent, and, changing into garments that were not very much drier than those they flung off, they spread their blankets over them and lay smoking upon their couches of springy spruce twigs while the light faded and the rain thrashed upon the canvas. The roar of the creek rang about them, and the firs on the hillside wailed dolefully in the chilly wind that buffeted the tent.

CHAPTER XXIV

BRODIE BECOMES SUSPICIOUS

THEY had just finished breakfast the next morning, and it was raining as heavily as ever, when, as they sat in the tent with the flap drawn back, Brodie saw the manager plodding up the hill.

"I'm going to find out how I stand in the next half-hour," he announced. "Guess this contract breaks me unless I can put up a bluff on that man."

He said nothing further, and Sydney, who was sorry for him, waited with a certain expectant curiosity for the interview. Presently the manager stopped in front of the tent.

"Aren't you getting to work this morning?" he asked.

Brodie indicated his wrecked dam with a wave of his hand.

"It doesn't seem much use. Go round and look at things, and then we'll talk."

The manager disappeared, and it was some time before he came back and sat down in the tent. He was a young man, with a forceful face, and it seemed to Sydney that he had singularly shrewd eyes.

"You have certainly had trouble," he said. "What are you going to do?"

Brodie filled his pipe before he answered him.

"I was kind of figuring that I'd let up. Doesn't strike me as worth while going on."

"In that case you'll get nothing for what you have done."

"Well," drawled Brodie, "seems to me it's going to pay me to make you a present of it. It would take me most a week clearing dirt out before I could begin to get things straight, and then I wouldn't be any farther on than I was when I first took hold. Wages are high just now, and I haven't a pile of money behind me."

"I put you on because I was told that when you took a contract you stayed with it and put it through. Somebody mentioned a trail you cut with part of it up a gulch where it seemed quite impossible to get a packhorse, and you had to blow out every rod with giant-powder. None of the boys, I heard, would look at it. At Long Divide, wasn't it?"

This allusion to one of his triumphs did not appear to have the effect on Brodie that Sydney fancied the other man had expected, for he smiled.

"I made about sixty dollars out of the whole thing, and I was most two months over it. That's not the kind of contract I've any hankering after. It's money I'm out for."

"I'm paying you a reasonable rate for the dam."

"Oh, yes," assented Brodie. "It's this set-back I'm worrying about. I've thrown away two weeks' wages —they're gone—and it seems kind of wiser to let them go and get out, instead of heaving as much more after them before I can earn a dollar. Anyway"—and he added this suggestively—"you'll have some notion why I'm not stuck on holding on by the time you have cleaned up ready for sending the next man in, though it wouldn't cost you quite as much as if you let him do it and paid him!"

Sydney fancied that the manager had grasped this point already, for he laughed.

"The trouble is that if you get a name for letting

up on your contracts it will stand in the way of your securing any more of them."

"That's quite right," admitted Brodie. "It sure hurts me to let up at all, but as I haven't a bank behind me, what am I going to do? At the same time, I'm open to allow that as you want the work put through right off the thing's rough on you."

The manager appeared to consider.

"It certainly will be awkward if the dam's not ready when the carpenters are through with the flume." He paused a moment. "I'll tell you what we'll do. Suppose we call the thing an accident, outside your contract, and I send you three or four of the boys to straighten up for a week, are you open to go on?"

"It's a deal," answered Brodie. "I'll make a start as soon as they and those two men of mine come along."

The manager took his departure, and Brodie sat smoking thoughtfully for some time before he turned to Sydney.

"This thing's not quite clear to me," he frowned.

"Haven't you got what you wanted?" laughed Sydney.

Brodie's eyes twinkled.

"That's just the point. I've got considerably more than I expected, and it makes me wonder how I did it. Now there's no reason why that boss should lay out a week's wages for three or four men when he'd only to stand off and let me face the trouble any way I could. He was that blame generous, I'm not sure of him. In a general way, a mining boss has no use for paying out a single dollar more than's necessary, and when you strike one who seems willing to do it the thing doesn't look natural."

"What object could he have had except getting the dam built as soon as possible?" asked Sydney.

"I don't quite know. One could almost fancy that

he's fond of me," grinned his companion. "Anyway, we'll let it go. I've saved my money."

Four men arrived from the mine, in addition to Brodie's two assistants, and they set to work soon afterward. They kept Sydney busy hauling loads of soil and gravel away from the dam and upsetting them on the hillside, and, as it happened, it rained persistently most of the time.

After the first two days none of them had a stitch of clothing that had not been drenched through, and when Sydney and Brodie crawled, muddy and jaded, into the tent at night, they sat wrapped in damp blankets, while their garments dried upon them with the heat of their bodies. Sydney's hands had grown soft with the constant wetting, and the stones had rubbed them raw in places and bruised them cruelly, while he ached in every joint from floundering in the churned-up mire. Then he became anxious about his oxen, which had given him a good deal of trouble since the rain set in, and one night he mentioned the matter to Brodie.

"Well," drawled the latter, "I guess all you have to do is to go along and ask the boss to let you start for the settlement and hire another team. Seems to me we could keep them busy, and he's not going to stick at a thing like that."

Sydney looked at him incredulously. Brodie smiled but was evidently in earnest.

"Go down in the morning and tell him you have got to have another span," he advised. "It's quite likely that you'll get them."

Sydney was inclined to believe that his companion had meant what he said, but as the rain stopped during the night he did not act on the suggestion. After that it was a little easier, for the mire dried up under a scorching sun, and the creek sank back within its banks; and they had dry clothes to wear and were no

longer forced to sleep in wet things and clammy blankets.

The days slipped by uneventfully and the dam was rising fast, when Sydney, at Brodie's instigation, walked down to the mine one evening to draw some of the wages due him. Wages are not invariably paid weekly in the bush or among the mountains, and it is by no means an unusual thing for them to be handed out at periods rather far apart, when a pay-clerk can be sent up from the city office; and in that case the workman is, as a rule, permitted to draw so much on account in the meanwhile as a favor. The manager, however, did not show himself as amenable as he had done in the matter of the dam.

"I can let you have five dollars, but not another cent," he said. "If you wait until the pay-clerk comes you'll get what's due you."

Sydney had to be content with this, for, after all, he had no reason for insisting on a large advance; but Brodie looked thoughtful when he heard what had passed between them.

"The thing's curious, and that's a fact," he commented. "You have drawn nothing yet, and now he'll go no higher than five dollars. Seems to me that man means to stick you until pay-day, anyway. I'd go right back in the morning and strike him for a new stable for the oxen, just to see what he'd do."

This appeared a little unreasonable, as the oxen did not belong to Sydney, and the shelter they occupied, though rudely put together, kept out the weather; and Sydney did not adopt the course suggested. He decided, however, that if the manager desired to keep him his action was comprehensible, because it was scarcely likely that he would leave the mine until he could collect the wages due him.

Shortly after this he crushed two of his fingers badly, and decided to take a couple of days off and

go down to the nearest settlement to buy some clothing he needed. Brodie said that he wanted a new hammer, among a few other things, and he made up his mind to go with him. Sydney fancied that there was something significant in the way the manager looked at them when they informed him of their intentions. He could, however, think of no reason that appeared to account for this, and they set off early in the morning, as it was a long march. It was a relief to get away from his laborious work, and he found it singularly pleasant to be once more at large in the bush. They stopped at noon and made a fire on the bank beside a little crystal creek just clear of the trail; and Sydney was lying very contentedly on a shelf of rock with a can of green tea beside him when a beat of horse hoofs came up across the bush. He could not see the trail from the spot where he was lying.

"Somebody riding in to the mine," he commented. "It's the only place the trail leads to."

Brodie, who lay a few yards away, among the little red wineberries opposite an opening in the trees, raised his head languidly.

"Looks like a man from the cities. A hardware drummer selling drills and fuses, I guess. He can't be the pay-clerk, as it's three or four days too soon."

They lay still for half an hour and then went on again, stopping for a swim in a clear river pool a few miles farther on; and in the evening they reached the wooden settlement. They slept in a hotel that night, and subsequently decided to spend another day there, partly because Sydney's hand was still sufficiently painful to prevent him from doing much work with it if he went back immediately. As a result of this they lounged about the place for several hours, and were standing at the door of a store when they saw a man getting into a wagon in front of the hotel.

"That's the man I saw on the trail," said Brodie.

"He'll be going in to the railroad. Must have left the mine at sunup to get here by now."

Another man climbed into the wagon, and when they drove away Brodie asked the store-keeper if he knew what the stranger's business was. The answer was an unexpected one.

"He's been up to the mine to pay the boys."

"The pay-clerk!" exclaimed Sydney, looking at Brodie.

Brodie did not seem exactly troubled, but his expression certainly suggested that he was thoughtful.

"I'm not worrying about the money, but I wonder why the boss didn't mention that he was coming."

"Perhaps he didn't know," suggested Sydney.

"That's possible. Still, somehow it doesn't strike me as likely."

He said nothing further upon the subject, and the next day they set out for the mine. It was late at night when they reached it, and as the manager had retired to his sleeping-quarters they did not see him until after breakfast in the morning. He was sitting in his office when they walked in.

"I have come for my pay," announced Sydney.

"Then you'll have to wait a month," said the manager. "The pay-clerk was here two days ago."

"But didn't he leave what was due me?"

"He didn't. The boys line up at the office when the clerk comes along, and any one who doesn't turn up must wait until next time."

"But in this case he didn't come on the regular day."

The manager smiled.

"None of the boys made any trouble about getting their wages a little earlier than usual."

"Couldn't you have warned us that he was expected when we told you that we were going to the settlement?"

"It wasn't my business," snapped the manager. "I have other things to think about. The rest all got their wages, and yours would have been paid you if you hadn't been away. If it's necessary, I can let you have a few dollars." He turned to Brodie. "You have a good deal of work to put in before there's any payment due you."

Sydney realized that he was in the man's hands, so he took the money and went out with Brodie. When they reached the dam Brodie sat down and lit his pipe.

"This thing is beyond my figuring," he declared.

"There's one explanation," Sydney suggested. "The man doesn't mean to pay us."

Brodie shook his head.

"No," he replied, "you were way out then. I've known the boys beaten out of their wages on wild-cat claims, but I guess we're not going to have any trouble of that kind here. You'll get your money, sure, if you line up with the others when the pay-clerk comes along."

Sydney was somewhat relieved to hear it, though the curiosity his companion's observations had excited was far from satisfied.

"Why couldn't he have told us the man was expected?" he asked.

"That," Brodie informed him, "is just what I'm worrying over now. I'm open to allow it might have been an accident—though the thing seems most unlikely. Anyway, if he'd wanted to keep you here, he had only to do just what he did, and, as it happened, you helped him."

Sydney recalled how the manager had looked at him when he had informed him that he was going to the settlement, and he sat silent a moment or two.

"I can't think of the least reason why he should be anxious to keep me here at all," he said at length.

"No more can I," answered Brodie, with a grin.

"I've struck men who were quite a way smarter at handling oxen and loading stones than you are. It looks very much as if he had wanted to hold on to both of us."

Sydney considered the matter carefully. The manager's desire to retain Brodie, even at the cost of making some sacrifice in order to do so, appeared more or less natural, as the latter was an excellent workman; but Sydney could think of no explanation that seemed applicable to his particular case. He was, as he admitted, not remarkably skilful at any of his duties, and he fancied that there would be no great difficulty in hiring more capable men at any of the settlements. This almost decided him that Brodie was taking too much for granted, and that the man could not have had any urgent wish to keep him.

"Well," he concluded, "the whole thing may just be coincidence after all. Hadn't we better get on?"

CHAPTER XXV

THE SUMMONS TO ACTION

IT was a blazing hot afternoon, and Sydney, leading his oxen into the shadow of a towering cedar, was glad of a few minutes' delay as he sat on the front of the jumper with his pipe in his hand. He had been told to bring up a cross-cut saw to the dam, near which a number of carpenters were already at work on the flume that was to convey the water to the mine, and he was then waiting for the tool.

Somber firs and cedars of great girth and stately height were scattered about the hillside, which was very steep just there, but they clustered in denser masses some distance above, where a narrow gap had been hewn through the midst of them. A skidded track that emerged from it led to the mine below, and small logs intended for sawing into props were run down this. There was no need to touch them once they were started, for the track was slightly hollowed and they rushed down across the skids until, checked by the decreasing slope, they slid quietly on to a staging ready for the saws. They used a good many props in that mine, and it was necessary to repair the skidway every now and then; and Sydney was aware that some unusually heavy logs had been sent down lately to be cut up for some purpose by the flume carpenters.

In the meanwhile there was no sign of the man who had promised to bring him the saw, and he leaned

against the load of stone looking about him languidly. He had been at work since early morning, and was conscious of a not altogether unpleasant lethargy. There was a drowsy essence in the heavy, honey-scented odors of the firs; the gravel on the uncovered patches of hillside was dazzling to look upon, and the abraded skids on the track glowed with light. The ringing of axes on the slopes above seemed to emphasize the silence of the woods, though there was also the tap-tap of heavy hammers lower down the hill. Looking around when the sound grew plainer, Sydney noticed two men working on the skidded track some distance away. Their duck garments formed blotches of crude blue color in the fierce light, and their bare arms showed up a warm chocolate brown. They seemed to be putting in new skids; but the glare from the gravel about them made Sydney's eyes ache, and he looked back again to the cool green of the climbing forest above him. The skidway which traversed it seemed to break off on the edge of a ridge, but he knew that this was because the descent was not quite so steep beyond the latter.

Suddenly the butt of what appeared to be a very big log swept into sight on the verge of the dip. It caught the sunlight, and at first looked like a big bright disc, but as it plunged downward the trunk behind it grew into shape. The skids were smooth, and, swiftly as it moved, it made no great noise. Sydney, springing to his feet, waved a warning hand and shouted to the men below. One of them dropped his hammer, and, jumping clear of the track, vanished into the shadow of two or three big cedars; but the other, who had his back to the log, remained bent over the timber he was evidently driving into place. Sydney shouted again, but the man showed no sign of hearing him, though the second shout had evidently reached his companion, for he appeared once more, and snatching up a piece of

gravel hurled it at the man below. The latter made a slight movement, as though he noticed the fall of the stone, but he did not look around, and the other man ran furiously down the hill toward him.

They had, however, been working about sixty or seventy yards apart, and the track was almost precipitous just there, and the man had scarcely started when he stumbled and went down headlong. Sydney was conscious of a thrill of horror. The tap of the other man's hammer still came up from below, and the big log was rushing faster and faster down the hill. He did not stop to see whether the runner had scrambled to his feet, for it now seemed impossible that he could reach his comrade before the log overtook him; but Sydney recognized that there was one thing he could do. A bound took him to the side of the near ox, and he smote the beast on its brawny neck. It gazed at him inquiringly, and then, as the big beasts strained on the yoke, the chain tightened with a jerk and the jumper slid forward.

The skidway crossed the trail to the dam scarcely two or three yards away; but that was far enough, for the log was close upon them and plunging downhill horribly fast. Sydney could hear the scream of the skids beneath it, but he fixed his eyes ahead as he struck and shouted to the oxen. He knew that he had only a few seconds in which to cross the track. The jumper jolted upon a skid, and the front of it dipped into the rubbed-out hollow. The log was almost upon them. The veins rose swollen on Sydney's forehead as he urged the beasts to another effort. They made it, floundering furiously and straining at the chain, and then he stopped them when the sled, with its big load of stone, lay right across the track.

He could not see what was going on below him, for the oxen were between him and the lower part of the declivity, and all his attention was concentrated on the

attempt to release them. He had his hand on the hook, over which the yoke chain slipped, when there was a deafening crash and he was flung bodily backward. The jumper and the oxen seemed to be dragged, or rather hurled, away from him, and the air was filled with flying stones. He staggered to his feet, half dazed, walked a pace or two, and then sat down again, feeling very limp. Leaning back against a stump he looked about him.

The oxen stood several yards away. They did not seem to be hurt, though the jumper was smashed and the load of stones was strewn about the hillside. The great log which had struck and scattered the puny obstruction had disappeared, but he could hear a sharp smashing of undergrowth which indicated that it was rushing on down the declivity, until silence suddenly followed a crash like that made by a shattered tree. Then he saw two men walking toward him up the skidway. They stopped near by and looked at him awkwardly.

"Hurt?" asked one of them.

"No," answered Sydney, "I don't think I am. Where's the log?"

"Jumped the skids. Smashed a young cedar down there in the bush and I guess it brought her up. That was quite a smart idea of yours to heave your jumper across the track. The log would have broke Pete up if you hadn't."

"A sure thing," vouched his companion, solemnly.

"Why didn't you jump clear when I shouted?" asked Sydney.

He looked at the last speaker, but the other man answered.

"Pete's a little slow of hearing," he explained with a deprecatory air. "I didn't remember it when you first called out. Only thing that struck me was that I'd be safer away from those skids."

Sydney smiled, for he noticed that the man made no reference to the fact that he had immediately afterward gone back in imminent peril to warn his comrade.

Then the other held out a big, hard hand.

"If ever you're up against it send for me," he said. "I like you."

Sydney felt somewhat embarrassed by his gravity, and he was glad to see a man appear with the saw just then. While the others discussed the incident with the newcomer Sydney quietly slipped away and led his oxen up the trail to the dam. He stopped them after a while, and taking out the wooden bow lifted the yoke. It was carefully smoothed inside, but he was not astonished to see that the hair had been violently rubbed off one beast's brawny neck. He could imagine what the strain on the yoke must have been.

Half an hour later he got one of the flume carpenters to repair his jumper, and after mentioning the incident to Brodie he thought little more about it; but he had, as it happened, made a friend.

Another week passed uneventfully, and then one of the men who had been down to the settlement left a newspaper at the dam. They did not open it until after supper, when Sydney lay outside the tent watching the wonderful green glow blaze behind the white tops of the range while Brodie read odd scraps of news to him. It was a cool, still evening, and a thin white mist rolled up toward them across the fir tops out of the shadowy valley. Sydney was just sufficiently weary after a long day's exertion to enjoy lying still, and he felt languidly content just then.

"Here's another mining meeting," announced Brodie at length. "The concern Carteret is general boss of. I've heard the boys say they wondered how he'd kept the thing on its feet so long."

"What's the name of it?" asked Sydney, sharply.

"Long Divide."

Sydney stretched out his hand for the paper and saw an announcement in the customary form that a meeting of the shareholders in the Long Divide mine would be held at a place and date specified, and that the stock register would be closed for several duly-mentioned days.

Then he dropped the paper, and raising himself on one elbow gazed out across the valley with resolution in his eyes. He could, he fancied, reach Carteret's ranch and afterward get to Vancouver the day before the meeting, if he started at once, though he would have very little time to spare. It was clear that if he attended the meeting a revelation must follow, but he felt he must go at any cost. For one thing, he was acutely anxious to learn what prospect there was for his shares to become valuable. Then he noticed that Brodie was watching him closely.

"Am I to understand that Carteret has had much trouble in keeping the thing going?" he asked.

"Well," answered Brodie, "though I don't know a great deal about it, I guess he has. Most all the talk in the stores and hotels in these settlements is about mines and mineral claims, and somehow the boys pick up news. Anyway, it's said that some of the stockholders would have knocked the bottom out of Long Divide quite a while ago and tried to liquidate it to get a few dollars back, if it hadn't been for Carteret. That was the only way, because they couldn't sell their stock; though I've heard that they've been mighty busy at the mine for the last few months."

Sydney knew enough about the affairs of joint-stock companies to realize that his voting power would be of some value to the directors if the latter were called on to face any determined opposition, which, in view of Brodie's statement, seemed likely to be the case. The reason why Carteret had been so anxious to secure

proof of his death became suddenly clear to him. If it had been obtained the shares he held would have been transferred to his legal successors, and Carteret would no doubt have secured the support of their proxies. It was becoming more and more evident that he must call on Carteret and explain matters, though this was a thing from which he shrank.

"Yes," he replied, "I was once at Long Divide, and they were unusually busy. Nobody seemed inclined to give me any information, but I had a fancy that they had struck, or expected to strike, high-grade ore."

Brodie smiled in a significant manner.

"It's quite likely. Carteret wouldn't have held on so long without a reason; and now he means to keep his thumb on the thing until the meeting. That's a smart man." He flashed a quick glance at Sydney. "It seems to be worrying you."

"It does. As it happens, I hold a large block of shares in the mine."

Brodie's start suggested that a light had suddenly dawned on him.

"Now," he said eagerly, "I guess I begin to understand. You sit tight and listen—it mayn't have struck you. When you swapped names with Hilton it seemed to me that you couldn't quite cover up your trail, and I had a notion all along that there were one or two things that might give you away. Suppose Hilton had turned up, after all, or that rancher man you went fishing with had come across you? He saw you both together."

"He met me at the station nearest Carteret's place," Sydney told him dryly. "What's more, he seemed reasonably sure of me."

Brodie made an expressive gesture.

"That takes us ahead. Now, as I've said, it has struck me that these folks here seem quite anxious to stick to us. The question is, What's their object?"

He paused, and looked impressively at Sydney.

"Here's my notion," he continued. "Suppose some big man who's kicking against Carteret knew you hadn't been killed. The first thing he'd want to do would be to keep you away from that company meeting."

It seemed very far-fetched reasoning, and based on somewhat insufficient premises, but, admitting the possibility of its being correct, it explained a good deal to Sydney, and he stood up with an air of decision.

"I'm going down to see Carteret," he asserted determinedly. "I'll start as soon as I have told the manager."

Brodie laughed in a dry fashion.

"You can be sure that what I said was right if he doesn't want to let you go."

Sydney strode away from the tent without another word; and shortly afterward he found the manager crossing the clearing at the mine.

"I want to go away at once," he said. "I may be away a week, or, perhaps, a little longer."

It was getting dark, but he fancied that the man had become suddenly alert and suspicious.

"What for?" he asked.

"Rather urgent private business."

"That's a pity, because you can't go."

"Why not?" demanded Sydney.

"A miner can't leave his work without due notice."

Sydney knew very little about the mining laws of British Columbia, and was uncertain as to how far the man's assurance was warranted. In the first place, however, it seemed advisable to ascertain whether he had any particular reason for not wishing to let him go.

"I dare say I could get you a substitute at the settlement, or, if you would prefer it, I would leave that to you, and if necessary you could offer him a small premium over my wages."

"No," replied the manager, decidedly. "I hired you, and you have got to stay."

This convinced Sydney that Brodie's suppositions were more or less borne out by facts, and he laughed.

"That's out of the question. I'm going to-night. I don't know whether you have any remedy, but if you have you must just make use of it."

"I'm holding quite a lot of money that is due you."

Sydney had expected this.

"Then if you are entitled to stick to it I suppose I'll have to put up with it, but I warn you that I have no intention of doing so unless it's unavoidable. Anyway, I'll start for the settlement now."

He swung around and strode away to tell Brodie about the interview. The latter smiled suggestively.

"If you're going, I guess you'd better get off right away, and I'll come along. Whether the boss can do anything to keep you back is more than I know, but it's quite likely that he'll try. He buys quite a few stores at the settlement, and hires some of the boys now and then. You want to get clear of the place and out on the trail to the railroad just as soon as you can."

Sydney objected, on the ground that he did not wish to involve his companion in any unpleasantness with the manager, but Brodie assured him that as the dam was only half built and must be finished shortly he did not apprehend any difficulty on that account. They set out soon afterward, and pushed on through the darkness as fast as possible, though they did not know that the manager had despatched a letter in charge of another man who took the trail scarcely half an hour after them. The latter, however, had considerably less incentive for haste than Sydney, and this fact had its effect on the pace he made. As it happened, the manager had heard nothing about the wrecking of Sydney's jumper by the log, and he had chosen Pete as his messenger.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN ARDUOUS JOURNEY

THE dew lay heavy upon the undergrowth and there was a wonderful exhilarating coolness in the early morning air. The sun had not as yet swung up above the scarped heights of the range, but the light was growing rapidly, and the great firs and cedars lifted their ragged spires clean-cut against the clear blueness of the sky. Farther down the winding valley the white mists lay motionless among the somber masses of the trees, but in one place the pale gleam of a river and a cluster of shingled roofs were faintly discernible.

Slowly Sydney and his companion plodded into sight of the settlement. Sydney's face was weary and his garments were damp with the dew. He limped a little, for one boot galled his foot, and he was aching all over. He had been hard at work with his oxen since soon after sunrise on the previous morning, and had spent the night plodding at the fastest pace he could over the very uneven trail. It was rough and rutted and strewn with big loose stones.

Neither he nor Brodie said anything when they caught the first glimpse of the settlement, but they strode forward a little more briskly, and soon were pleased to see several trails of thin blue vapor rise and spread about the roofs. It showed that the inhabitants were stirring, for men rise early in that country, and

Sydney was glad to think that he would not be likely to meet with any very undesirable delay.

Shortly afterward they reached the settlement, and walking between two straggling rows of houses, most of which were made of logs, though there were frame buildings among them, they entered the little hotel. Sydney flung himself wearily into the nearest chair. The room was, as usual, scantily furnished and contained very little beyond a table and a couple of rude benches, but a railroad time-table hung on one uncovered wall, and Brodie took it down.

"You could get the west-bound train if you started in an hour and a half; but I guess I'd get off earlier," he advised. "It's quite a long ride, and I have a notion that the boss has sent one of the boys on after you. Anyway, I'll see about a horse first thing, and then we'll get breakfast."

Sydney, stretching himself out contentedly in his chair, felt that he would be glad to sit still for an hour or so. He did not think that the manager would attempt to use force to prevent him from leaving the place, but he was a little uneasy, nevertheless.

A few minutes later the proprietor of the hotel came in, and sat down when Brodie spoke to him.

"Yes," he said, "I can get you a horse. I do all the freight-packing that's wanted round here. As I'll have to send over to the railroad for the beast it will cost you six dollars."

Just then another man with a bronzed face strolled in, but he crossed to the opposite side of the room, and Brodie turned to Sydney.

"Give him the money and clinch the deal," he said, leaning forward and speaking in his companion's ear.

Sydney did as he suggested, and the proprietor asked when he meant to start.

"Soon as we've had breakfast," answered Brodie. "You can tell them to get the horse saddled now."

The proprietor said that he would see to it, and that breakfast would be ready in about half an hour. When he went out the stranger looked at Sydney with a smile.

"He struck you for quite enough, but he has first call on the three or four horses there are in the place," he said. "As anybody who wants any packing done comes to him, the boys have to let him have them. I found that out when I tried to cut his terms by getting somebody else to pack my tent and stores up into the bush."

"You're prospecting around here?" inquired Brodie.

The stranger nodded.

"Investigating a copper lead in the hills. Some city people sent me up. I do that kind of thing now and then."

"Then you are probably well posted in the general mining news," Sydney broke in eagerly. "Do you know anything about Long Divide? I believe they're having the stockholders' meeting shortly."

"That's quite right," confirmed the prospector. "I don't know much about the thing—it's a one-horse mine—but I met a man not long ago who holds some stock in it, and from what he said he couldn't get rid of it. Told me he'd had notice of the meeting, and had been warned about some new policy that would make trouble. He was going down to Vancouver to vote against it."

Brodie smiled as he glanced at Sydney, and then changed the subject, and they talked about prospecting and mining until breakfast was brought in. One or two other men sat down with them, but after the meal was over Sydney and Brodie went out to smoke on the rude veranda in front of the hotel. One could see a few hundred yards up the trail that led down the valley from there.

"I'll get off in a few minutes," said Sydney. "He hasn't brought the horse yet."

He sat down on a bench in the sunshine, which then was just pleasantly warm, and lighting his pipe determined to make the most of the brief rest, for there was a long and toilsome journey still in front of him. As he was gazing up the trail with heavy eyes a few moments later, a man came out of the shadow and plodded down the narrow gap between the towering firs. He seemed to be walking wearily with his head bent down. Sydney called Brodie's attention to him, and the latter jumped to his feet.

"From the mine!" he exclaimed, and added, "It's Pete."

"Will you ask them if the horse is ready?" requested Sydney, sharply.

Brodie ran down the veranda steps; and coming back shortly afterward he overtook Pete ascending them.

"They'll have the horse round in a minute or two. The man's just putting the saddle on," said Brodie.

Pete handed Sydney an envelope.

"From the boss."

Sydney tore it open and found that it contained a brief intimation that the wages due him would be retained until a claim for damage resulting from his having left his work without notice had been satisfied. He handed it to Brodie, who read it thoughtfully.

"Bluff!" he declared. "At the most, he could only charge you until the notice had run off. That's not what he sent down for. Where's Pete?"

Sydney looked around, but Pete had disappeared. Just then, however, a man led a saddled horse along the street below.

"I'd get off right away," advised Brodie. "Oh, here's Pete again. What did you slip away for? Where have you been?"

Pete came out of the doorway and sat down near them.

"Just handing the man who keeps this place another letter from the boss."

"You don't know what it's about?" questioned Sydney.

"I don't. He only said I was to hand it over as soon as I got in, and give you the other one before you left the settlement."

Brodie looked at Sydney, who rose and ran down the steps; but before he reached the horse the proprietor appeared below and turned toward him.

"I'm sorry, but you can't have that horse after all," he said. "Here's your six dollars. I'll need the horse."

It was quite clear to Sydney that the manager had directed the man to do what he could to delay him. As the latter despatched to the mine with his packhorses most of the stores used there and no doubt charged a high freight for it, Sydney fancied that he would be willing to oblige his employer as far as it was in his power.

"You can keep the money," Sydney replied. "I hired the horse, and I mean to take it."

The proprietor motioned to the man who held the horse that he was to lead it away; but just then Pete, who had joined the group, laid a hand on the bridle, and Brodie came up with the prospector.

"Hold on!" cried the latter. "I saw the deal made and the money paid. Let the stranger have the horse."

In the meanwhile a number of the inhabitants of the place had come out into the street, and the proprietor called to them.

"Boys," he asked, "are you going to let this stranger steal my horse?"

Three or four of them came up and joined the group. Sydney, disregarding them, strode forward a

pace toward the proprietor, with an ominous flash in his eyes.

"Tell your man to let go the bridle," he demanded. "I hired that horse."

"You can't have it," snarled the other, and suddenly raised his voice. "Stand back! If you move another step you'll sure get hurt!"

He had taken a riding-quirt from the man who held the horse, and he now swung it up, gripping it by the thinner end. Sydney could not get by him, and he reached out for his shoulder to thrust him aside. Immediately the heavy handle came down on his face. It was a vicious blow, and Sydney, staggering for a moment, felt his cheek grow warm and moist as he struck.

He lunged forward as his left arm shot out, and his knuckles jarred on something hard. The next moment there was nobody in his way, and running forward, half dazed and partly blinded by a warm trickle that ran into his eye, he saw that the man who had held the horse was on the ground, and that Pete was dragging it toward him. He had a hazy notion that the prospector and Brodie were holding some of the others back, but he paid no heed to them. Pete held the startled horse while he swung himself up, and then thrust the riding-quirt into his hand.

"Get off right now!" he cried.

Sydney drew his hand across his eyes and struck the horse. He did not seem able to see very well, but he made out that the proprietor was getting up, and that the man who had held the horse was slipping away down the street. Brodie and the prospector were apparently expostulating with the rest of the group, but there was nothing to suggest that any of them meditated further violence, and when Pete called to him again he rode out of the settlement at a gallop. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the proprietor

and his friends would realize that there was nothing to be gained by making a disturbance now that he had gone off with the horse; and he was right in this. The proprietor hurled one or two vitriolic epithets after him, and then retired into the house, while the group of men dispersed, and soon after the midday meal Brodie and Pete set out together for the mine.

In the meanwhile Sydney rode hard through the shadow of the firs. He discovered that one of his hands was freely smeared with blood, and he was conscious of a certain regret that he had not pulled the horse up and made a vigorous use of the quirt. It would have been a relief; but, after all, the two principal aggressors had been put out of the fight without it, and he realized that he must subordinate any impulses of that kind to the purpose he had in hand. It was clearly necessary that he should attend the stockholders' meeting in Vancouver, and, if possible, obtain an interview with Carteret before he did so.

He caught the west-bound train at another settlement, though he had very little time to spare; and when he stood before a little mirror in the lavatory of a Colonist car he understood why the agent had gazed at him in evident astonishment as he bought his ticket. He was covered with dust; there were red stains on his jacket and a gash on his forehead. He did not think the cut was serious, but it became sufficiently painful when he bathed it. Setting out from the mine in haste he had brought no spare clothing with him, and it was clear that when he reached Vancouver he would not have more than a dollar or two in his pocket.

Lying down full length on one of the seats, he tried to go to sleep, but could not manage it. The uncushioned woodwork vibrated unpleasantly, and the train seemed to be jolting furiously down-grade. Besides,

where the line led clear of the forest, blazing sunshine streamed into the car, and, tired as he was, he was restless and overstrung. He abandoned the attempt finally, and sat still, smoking most of the time, while the train swept on along tremendous hillsides dotted with climbing pines; across green, froth-streaked rivers; and past lonely blue lakes girt with somber forest. There was something soothing in the rhythmic clash and clatter and clamor of the wheels that was flung back in loud pulsations now and then as the long cars plunged through a strip of forest or went rocking down some reverberating gorge.

It was late at night when he reached the little station nearest Carteret's ranch, but he knew where he could get a saddle-horse; and after leaving word with the station-agent, from whom he borrowed a lantern, he mounted wearily and set off on another stage of his journey.

It was a pitch-dark night and the mists hung heavily among the firs, but he urged the horse to its fastest pace and comforted himself with the reflection that he could not very well get off the trail without recognizing it, though he admitted that there were places where the knowledge that he had done so, if acquired, was likely to be conveyed in a singularly painful manner. For the most part it had been hewn out of primeval forest and was walled in by matted undergrowth and breast-high fern, but every here and there it wound along the slope of an almost precipitous declivity, with nothing to prevent the traveler from plunging over the edge.

Now and then he could distinguish the blurred shapes of trees that flitted past him, and once or twice there was a break in the gloom above and he fancied that he could see the sky; but most of the time there was only impenetrable darkness about and in front of him, and he relied on the horse to keep the

trail. The beast, he was glad to remember, traveled over it frequently.

At irregular intervals they went stumbling and sliding down some slope he fancied he recognized, amid a rattle of rolling stones, though once or twice he was uncertain as to whether he had not left the trail and was riding down into a breakneck hollow. On other occasions the horse's hoofs fell with a different sound as they crossed a wooden bridge; or they splashed through a shallow ford which showed him where he was, and it was a relief to learn how far he had gone.

In the meanwhile he was growing very weary. He had seldom been in the saddle since he came to Canada, and he had already spent one night on the trail. Then after a very scanty rest he had set out again and ridden a good many leagues over a very rugged hillside before he caught the train. What was almost as much to the purpose, he had had only one very insufficient meal, eaten in two or three minutes at a lonely ranch, since breakfast. It was, however, clear that he must hold out until he reached Carteret's ranch, and he braced himself for the effort, jolting limply in his saddle, half asleep at times, while the night seemed to lengthen out interminably.

At last, however, it grew a little cooler, and the darkness imperceptibly became less dense. He could now see the trees that flitted by, and they slowly changed from shapeless shadows into black spires with a sharply-fretted outline. White mists streamed in and out among them; there was a sweet, resinous smell; and at length a ray of radiant light streamed down into the valley and dazzled his heavy eyes. Then he realized that he was wet with the dew, and that the gash on his forehead was becoming excruciatingly painful. He looked longingly at a fallen log, on which the widening sunlight fell, and then struck

the jaded horse and rode on up the ascent to a high divide.

There was no haze about him when he reached the summit, though thin white trails of vapor drifted here and there below. Looking down across the forest he caught the faint gleam of a distant lake that still lay in shadow in the valley. There was a tiny gap in the somber bush near the water, and on one side of that stood Carteret's ranch.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE REVELATION

CLARE and Lucy Brattan were sitting on the veranda at the Carteret ranch, waiting for breakfast. Lucy, raising her head, glanced up at the forest that rolled down the valley.

"I thought I heard a beat of hoofs, but it seems to have gone again," she said.

Clare listened for a moment, but as far as she could hear only the song of the river disturbed the silence of the encircling woods. It was very still that morning, as it usually is in those forest-shrouded valleys in summer-time, and trails of gauzy mist still hung motionless here and there about the steep hillside.

"No," she responded, "there's not a sound except the roar of the rapid, and that's rather plainer than usual, but at first I thought you might be right. We are expecting word from my father, who promised to arrange with the station-agent to forward the letter. In fact, I hope he has written, because I fancy he was a little anxious about the business that took him to Vancouver, and I could send the letter you saw on to him with the messenger. It will be nearly a week before the mail-carrier comes through, and something ought to be done with it."

Lucy leaned back in her chair, which she drew farther into the shadow, for the sun was already getting hot, and then glanced at her companion with

a thoughtful expression. Two or three days earlier a letter addressed to Sydney J. Carteret had been delivered at the ranch, and the postmark was that of a little wooden town in the Okanagan country.

"I suppose you haven't heard from Jardine since he left? If you have, you didn't mention it."

"No," answered Clare, with a subtle change of manner, "I haven't. For that matter, why should he write to me?"

"Have you any reason for supposing I meant to single you out personally? It occurred to me that he might, perhaps, write to your father. You were not the only one who treated him rather decently."

Clare's face remained expressionless. In fact, it was almost suspiciously quiet; but Lucy fancied that she felt aggrieved by the fact that the man had sent them no word at all.

"In any case he didn't, as I have told you."

"Then you don't know whether he is coming back before we go away?"

"No. It is, however, scarcely likely."

Lucy was conscious of an uncontrollable desire to disturb her companion's exasperating composure.

"Then you're not in the least anxious to see him?"

"Why should I be?" This time Clare's tone was perceptibly sharper. "He went away because he wished to, and I have no doubt that if he stays away it will be because it pleases him. One could imagine that the higher wages he is probably obtaining are a consideration."

Lucy laughed. Her companion had at length permitted her resentment to become apparent, though she seemed to have recognized the fact, for the last suggestion had clearly been added as an afterthought to tone down the rest.

"Well," admitted Lucy with a laugh in which she was quite aware that there was just a trace of wist-

fulness, "I don't mind telling you that I'd rather he were here. The place is dull without him." She turned and looked at Clare in a manner which the latter felt was meant to be provocative. "I wonder whether there's any significance in the fact that you never go fishing now?"

Clare made no answer to this, and there was silence for a while, during which Lucy lay listening to the roar of the river, and, as she was becoming sure, to another sound. Though Clare did not seem to notice it, there was certainly a faint rhythmic beat of horse hoofs drawing nearer down the trail. Then she started as a mounted man rode out of the shadow of the bush, but it was a moment or two before she leaned forward and touched the arm of Clare, who was looking the other way.

"I don't know whether you'll be pleased to see Jardine or not, but here he is," she said.

Then at last Clare's composure failed her altogether. She grasped the arm of her chair hard, and a warm flush of color flickered into her face and suddenly died out of it again.

"Oh," she gasped, "he's looking like a ghost!"

The description was to some extent borne out by the appearance of the man who rode into the clearing. His horse moved slowly with lowered head, and the bridle hung slack in the rider's hand. He sat limply in his saddle, with the red dust thick upon him, and his face was gray as with weariness or pain, except where a red scar crossed his forehead. He rode straight toward the house, though, as the girls sat in the shadow, it was evident that he did not see them until he drew bridle close beneath the veranda. Then he looked up and took off his dust-sprinkled hat.

"Is your father at home, Miss Carteret?" he asked.

"No," answered Clare. "He went down to Vancouver a few days ago."

Sydney made a gesture expressive of dejected resignation; and Lucy realized with a pang of regret that he had not even noticed her.

"Then I must go on after him; though, as there isn't an earlier train I could get, I needn't start until to-night," he said. "I'll put the horse up."

He swung himself down wearily, and as he led the beast away toward the stable Clare laughed. It was a curious little laugh with a hint of strain in it. His sudden appearance had startled her badly and set her heart beating painfully fast; but he had said so little, and the few words had been almost exasperatingly matter-of-fact. Then Lucy called after him:

"Breakfast will be ready in half an hour. We'll expect you."

The man, turning around, made a sign that he had heard her, and then went on again until he reached the stable, where he made shift to unsaddle and rub down the horse, for there was another journey before them that night. After he had seen to its comfort he sat down on a pile of timothy hay in an empty stall and rested his aching shoulders against the wall. He realized that if he was to breakfast with Clare and her companion he must make some attempt at a toilet, and he did not feel capable of doing it just then. He sat still a while, recalling with a recurring of confused emotions the effect the first glimpse he had caught of the ranch a quarter of an hour ago had had on him.

After the stress and effort to which he had been accustomed at the mine, the lack of every little thing that would have conduced to bodily ease at Brodie's tent, and the sordid, repellent discomfort of the miners' quarters which he had occasionally visited, the trim, spacious house with its painted shutters, wide veranda and artistic scroll-work, had strongly appealed to him. Girt about with solemn forest, and bright

with warm sunshine, it seemed to stand for ease and quietness, refinement and leisure; all the things, in fact, that made life desirable. They were also things that had once been his, and might—he felt his heart beat at the thought—perhaps be his again. This made the fact that he must go on to Vancouver and attend the stockholders' meeting even clearer than it had been already.

By degrees, however, his eyes grew very heavy, and he sank farther down among the hay. It yielded seductively beneath his aching limbs, and the elbow on which he now rested was pressed deep in it. After that his shoulders slipped a little lower, and in another few minutes he was sound asleep.

In the meanwhile breakfast was being laid out in the ranch, and as he did not appear Clare and Lucy strolled toward the stable to discover what was keeping him. They stopped abruptly when they reached the stall, and Clare's eyes grew soft with an almost painful compassion as she looked down upon the sleeping man. He had flung off his jacket, and lay clad in thin blue garments stained with soil and thick with dust. There were discolored stains on the breast of his coarse blue shirt, and the red scar which suggested the cause of them was very plain on his forehead. One hand was flung out, and she could see that it was bruised and battered, and that the nails were broken. The man looked worn and weary with heavy toil. Turning softly, she touched Lucy's arm.

"What shall we do?" she asked.

"Let him sleep," replied Lucy, drawing her away very gently.

They stopped when they reached the clearing, and Clare sat down on a fallen fir.

"It is strange that I should have stood beside him—in much the same way—once already when he was asleep, and he was hurt then, too," she said.

Lucy turned toward her quietly.

"The last fact, at least, is not astonishing. These men get hurt often—it's unavoidable. The prosperity of this province demands it of them. They are the ones who pay."

She saw the warmth in her companion's cheek and went on.

"This man was reared in England—delicately—but he does not seem to have shrunk from the burden. It must be heavy now and then to some like him, but I don't think they are far behind the others when the pace is speeded up to the limit in our logging camps and mines and mills. In a way, I'm glad I met him. It gives one a friendly feeling for—the boys—as we call them."

Then she laughed.

"Well," she continued, "it's reasonably sure that although he might feel embarrassed it wouldn't quicken his heart a single beat if he knew what I think of him; and in the meanwhile I dare say Jean Graham is waiting breakfast for us."

She rose, but instead of moving forward she stood still and looked at her companion.

"The last time he was hurt it was directly your fault. Now, however, you are not quite so much to blame."

Clare seemed startled.

"How am I to blame at all?"

"Perhaps I should have said that you were responsible," Lucy corrected herself. "You see, if you hadn't been concerned in the matter, it's rather more than possible that he would never have gone away."

Clare recognized the truth of this. She remembered that the man had told her it was impossible for him to accept her father's bounty for work he did not do; and she had suspected then that his scruples would not have had so much weight with him had his employer been any other man.

"How did you guess that?" she asked.

"Oh," answered Lucy, with a wry smile, "I can't exactly tell you. Still, I know I guessed right. If you must have an explanation, you can call it sympathy."

Clare looked at her with sudden tense interest in her eyes, and then turned her head away, and they went back to the house together silently.

Sydney did not appear during the morning, and when the midday meal was laid out there was still no sign of him; but, knowing that he had another long journey to make, they did not disturb him. When he awakened he noticed with sudden alarm that the shadows had already crept across the clearing, but a glance at his watch showed him that he need not start for an hour or two yet, and he walked across to his ranch. When he had lighted the stove he went down to the lake for a swim, and coming back dressed himself carefully in his newest clothes. After that he made a simple meal of canned stuff and flapjacks, and lay contentedly still in a hide chair for another hour or so. Indeed, it was only by an effort that he rose at length to go back to the Carteret ranch. Desirous as he was of seeing Clare, he felt that it might be wiser to wait until after the stockholders' meeting and the revelation that it would compel him to make. He was worn out, overstrung and anxious, and, as the result of it, half afraid that he could not rely on his self-restraint. It seemed possible that he might yield to some rash impulse or be driven into too precipitate speech, just when prudence was most advisable. There was a significance in the fact that, while he recognized this clearly, he still proceeded toward the ranch.

Clare was sitting in a cool, shadowy room when he walked in, and, simply as it was furnished, the comfort and spaciousness of it appealed to him, until his

eyes rested on the girl. Then he forgot everything else, for there was sympathy in her smiling eyes, and she looked delightfully cool and tranquil in her thin white dress. That she had a finely-moulded figure, and that her face was, to him, at least, perfect in outline and delicate tinting, did not count for so much. It was her general manner that had always impressed him most; the subtle, half-realizable stateliness of it, the suggestion of force and intelligence, her candor and graciousness, and the blending of the whole into a vague, intangible something that was the salient characteristic of her personality.

"You have had a sound sleep," she said.

Sydney smiled and sat down when she pointed to a chair.

"I think I needed it. I made a forced journey to get here by this morning, which is my excuse for appearing—as I did. I shall have to go on to Vancouver almost immediately."

"You seem scarcely fit to ride as far as the settlement to-night," responded Clare. "Your forehead must be painful, too. How did you hurt it?"

"It was another man did that for me," laughed Sydney. "Very discreditable, isn't it? However, he wouldn't let me have a horse I had hired and paid for, and I had to insist, as it was imperative that I should catch the train. As your father has already gone, I must follow him."

"You have something important to tell him? I wonder whether it can have anything to do with the Long Divide mine? I know he has been rather anxious about it lately."

"Yes," answered Sydney, with a trace of grimness, "it certainly has."

Clare crossed the room and took a letter from a drawer.

"How curious!" she observed. "Here is another

thing which I fancy, from what he said to Mrs. Graham just before he left, almost appears to bear upon the same matter. You will give this to him and tell him it came a day or two ago? We had no means of sending it on."

Sydney took the letter, and the girl's fingers touched his hand as he did so. She was standing very close at his side, and he set his lips tight as he felt a thrill run through him. Overstrung, worn out and a little off his guard as he was, he grappled with an almost overwhelming impulse that prompted him to seize her hands and draw her to him. Then he looked down at the envelope and started, for it bore his name.

"It must be from Hilton," he said, and tore it open.

The thing was done naturally and by sheer force of habit, in a moment of tension when all his faculties had been concentrated on the effort to retain his self-command, before he realized what the result must be. Then he saw Clare suddenly move away from him with bewilderment in her eyes.

"You have opened it!" she exclaimed in a strained voice.

"Yes," assented Sydney, very grimly, "I have opened it. It's mine."

Clare leaned on the back of a chair with one hand, as though she needed support, and her expression suggested consternation.

"Then—who—are you?"

"Sydney—Jardine—Carteret."

There was silence for the next few seconds, and during it the blood swept suddenly into the girl's cheek. The man stood very upright, gazing at her fixedly, with one hand tightly closed.

"Sit down," she gasped at length. "There is something to be said. Why did you come here and conceal your real name from us, while you worked as a laborer on my father's ranch?"

"When I decided to buy Jackson's place I had no idea that it would lead to my becoming a hired man here. I took it on Brodie's assurance that it was the only one I could get for the money at my disposal. As to the rest of the question, wasn't there a sufficient reason for my wish to hide my identity—the disgrace, the disastrous failure, and—it must be mentioned—the unjust suspicions attached to my brother's death?"

"Yes," Clare acknowledged, "it seems convincing—on the face of it."

Then she glanced up and saw the sparkle in Sydney's eyes.

"I have the honor of assuring you that it is the fact," he said. "Would I be likely to drag—these things—in if by any means it could have been avoided?"

There was indignant protest in his tone, and Clare's expression became a little more gentle.

"No," she admitted. "You must forgive me that." She paused and hesitated. "Why did you come here—to Canada, I mean—in the first place?"

The man looked at her steadily.

"That must be answered—because I value your good opinion—and to clear myself. I came originally because first my father and then Jim suggested that I should do so. Indeed, Jim, who must have foreseen the disaster, urged me persistently."

He saw the color creep back into the girl's face, and, still looking at her steadily, he made a little deprecatory gesture.

"It's difficult to explain, but I think it must be done," he proceeded. "I came merely that I could tell Jim that I had seen you."

Clare leaned forward in her chair with a laugh that had a jarring note in it.

"Yes," she said, "you have explained it very clearly. You would have added that it was quite sufficient

to have seen me, and that he could let the matter drop altogether."

She saw the quick signs of anger in the man's face, and was not displeased with them.

"Well," he replied, "the result of my visit wasn't exactly what I had anticipated, but in any case wouldn't the course I suggested have been preferable to my being willing to marry you for your money?"

"There is not the least doubt upon that point," Clare admitted with a disdainful chilliness which flung him off his guard altogether.

He rose, and moving a pace or two forward, stood looking down masterfully at her.

"Now," he said, "I am going to insist on your listening to me for a few minutes, and, first of all, I want to say that I haven't the least reason for being proud of the part I chose—or was forced—to play. When I was free to seek your favor nothing would induce me to do it. You must understand that I hadn't seen you then. Afterward, when I bought Jackson's ranch, it was a matter of regret to me that it brought me into contact with your father; but I could see no way of avoiding it. I must ask you if you can believe all this before I go on?"

Clare flashed one quick glance at him, and her voice was very gentle.

"Yes, I think I can."

"Then I became your attendant—at first against my will—but presently I knew that the best thing life had to offer me was to see you daily—to be in your company. When that became clear I should, perhaps, have gone away. As it happened, I hadn't the strength to do so."

"Ah," murmured Clare, "are you very sorry you stayed?"

Her eyes met his for a moment before she turned her head away. The man laughed triumphantly.

"Wise or foolish, I am only glad," he cried, and stooping swiftly caught both her hands. "Within a few weeks of the day I first saw you I knew what you were and would always be to me. Clare"—and he compelled her to rise and face him—"now that I have crowned the whole folly by making this clear to you, you will not send me away from you?"

She leaned forward toward him, saying nothing, and he drew her suddenly into his arms.

"Now," he declared with hoarse exultation, "nothing matters."

It was a minute later when she drew herself away from him, and he let his hands fall to his side.

"Dear," he said, "there is probably trouble before us, and I have drawn you into it. For that you must try to forgive me."

Clare's eyes shone as she glanced up at him with a smile.

"Is there anything very dreadful to fear?"

Sydney made a little gesture.

"Your father's opposition. His very justifiable anger. Still, there is this in my favor. I am going tonight to Vancouver to support him at the meeting."

Clare looked up sharply.

"You can do that?"

"I hold shares in the Long Divide. If there is a close struggle the votes they carry may turn the scale. May I say now that it was partly because I felt that those shares might set me on my feet by and by that I did not try more earnestly—to go away?"

The girl smiled at him.

"Then I am glad you held them; and I almost think my father would find it easy to forgive you—a worse folly—if your support enabled him to defeat his enemies."

She held out her hands to him.

"Sydney," she added, "that is the only reason why

I must let you start for Vancouver to-night. You will stand by him in the fight he expects."

A few minutes later Mrs. Graham entered the room, and shortly afterward Sydney swung himself into the saddle and rode up the climbing trail.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NEILSON'S MESSAGE

IT was late at night when Neilson sat in his iron-roofed office at Long Divide thinking earnestly. His face was a little anxious, as well as somewhat worn, for he had been working at high pressure for the past few weeks, during which he had had many difficulties with which to contend. What was as much to the purpose, he was far from sure that they were over yet. The company paid him his salary, but he was Carteret's man, and it must be admitted that, knowing something about affairs outside his particular province, he was a staunch partizan. This was why he fixed his attention upon a careful review of the situation, as far as he was acquainted with it, as he leaned back easily in his chair.

To begin with, he had retimbered the new heading after its collapse, and, though it cost him a determined effort, he had also succeeded in getting out a certain quantity of high-grade ore. The quantity was not quite as large as Carteret had desired, but Neilson fancied that the results of its reduction should, after all, prove satisfactory to his employer. Whether they were equally satisfactory to the rest of the directors did not seem to matter, for Carteret was still boss of Long Divide, though Neilson had reasons for believing that his somewhat autocratic authority would shortly be rudely questioned.

The stockholders' meeting was to be held in three or four days, and Neilson knew that a brief report of any encouraging possibilities which had opened up since the more detailed and formal one had been despatched would, if sent up from the mine at the last moment, strengthen Carteret's hand. He was wondering whether he could write such a report, and had half decided to do it at once, as there were several encouraging facts that he could mention, but it seemed wiser to postpone the thing until the morning, for, on the other hand, there had been several ominous falls of rock during the day, as well as a troublesome influx of water. Anxious as he was to support his employer as far as in his power, he had no desire to give the latter's opponents any legitimate ground for complaint, which they would undoubtedly have if, immediately after sending his message, he should be called upon to grapple with another costly collapse of the heading. The latter, as he was compelled to admit, was by no means improbable.

The door of his office stood open, for the night was warm, and by and by he heard the rattle of a running wire and the throbbing of an engine as a tub of ore came up. There was no particular reason why this should interest him, but, although he would in the usual course have retired some time ago, he was restless and indisposed for sleep, and he decided that he would walk across to the shaft-head. He had been working at high tension most of the day, and as one result of it he welcomed the excuse for any trifling physical exertion that might have a tranquillizing effect.

Putting on his soft hat he went out, and when he had moved forward a few yards he stood still a moment to accustom his eyes to the darkness. It seemed unusually dense, and it was some time before he made out the serrated summit of the black wall of forest

where it cut against the sky. Then the blurred mass of the ore dump with the chimney-stack and the buildings above it became faintly visible. He proceeded toward them circumspectly, until he stopped where a light blinked among the framing over the shaft-head. A man in wet and miry overalls, who had just ascended with the tub, stood talking to another beneath the light. He turned to Neilson when he caught sight of him.

"Dave sent me up for a couple of new drills," he explained. "He told me to say that he'd like steam put on the pulsometer, unless the engineer could get a little more out of the standing pump. There's quite a lot of water gathering."

"I'll see to it," said Neilson. "Have you had any more rock coming down?"

"Only an odd stone or two. Still, it's quite likely we're going to have trouble about the new cut. Dave was putting in the props you told him about when I came up."

Neilson asked him a few more questions, and told him that he was to be sent for the moment it appeared necessary, and then he turned away toward the engine-room. It was scarcely an hour since he left the mine, and as he had given his overseers full instructions he did not think it would serve any purpose if he went down again. His uneasiness, however, was by no means diminished by what he had heard.

He sat down beneath the great rocking beam of the pump when he had spoken to the engineer, and lighted a cigar. The wheezing of the wide cylinder and the clang and clatter as the gleaming plunger went down into the darkness with a shock were somehow comforting. It spoke of power under man's control that could be called upon to cope with the great primitive forces arrayed against him in the darkness of the mine. Besides this, he liked to see the engineer moving about

the gleaming machinery with his flaring lamp. He was still unconscious of the least desire for sleep.

An hour slipped by, and then, for the shaft-head was close by, the sound of a dull crash rose suddenly as from a depth below, and was followed by a curious muffled rumbling. Neilson started to his feet, with every nerve in him tingling, and the engineer who sped across the floor stopped and stood poised with his hand on a lever, until the sharp, imperious summons of a gong rang out. Then he pulled down the lever and a big wheel rattled overhead, while a line of running wire gleamed athwart a ray of light.

"I guess they want that tub whipped up right smart," he said.

Neilson, who saw his face, knew what he meant, and he laid a strong restraint upon himself as he turned away toward the shaft-head. He would need all his faculties in the next few minutes, and collectedness was the most essential.

The tub swung into sight as he reached the framing, and a man whose face showed pale and set in the lamp-light sprang out.

"Better come down right now!" he gasped. "Big fall that's headed off half the boys in the new level!"

Neilson asked him no questions, but swung himself into the tub, which dropped suddenly with him into the blackness below. Then it stopped, and getting out he stood amidst a cluster of half-naked men with tense faces. He flashed a quick glance at them.

"The rest are headed up in the level?"

Some of them began confused and half-breathless explanations.

"Gave us no warning. Caved right in after the first timber broke. Dave's in with the other boys. Big stone fell on Custer."

Neilson raised his hand for silence. Then, taking a lamp from one of them, he signed to them to follow

him. They trooped back up the dark tunnel in which there was not a light left, until they reached a spot where farther progress was barred by a fall of stone. It filled up all the heading, and there was no means of telling how far it extended. Neilson spoke to one of the men, who still carried a drill, and he set the point of it ringing against the stone. It was a call that would be recognized by any one who heard it; but no faint, muffled answer came back, as some of them had half expected. Then they looked at one another significantly.

"Where was it that the timber broke?" Neilson asked.

They told him and he turned to them quietly.

"You"—and he pointed to one of them—"go up and fetch the other shift down. Bring along a few sticks of giant-powder from the magazine. The rest of you get picks and shovels. We'll start right now."

The working face was narrow, but there was a task for all, as the stones and spoil they dislodged had to be passed back and loaded into tubs to make room for what would follow. Stripped almost naked, with the sweat of tense effort dripping from them, they toiled furiously. There were stones that could not be prized out with a wedged-in pick, and these they tore clear with their hands. Some that could not be moved by any other means they brought out by inserting a little roll of plastic yellow powder. This was a somewhat perilous proceeding, as there was a certain probability that the concussion might bring down more of the roof; but an extra hazard did not count for much just then, and the flying fragments had scarcely fallen when they swarmed back to the attack, gasping in the smoke. There was no ventilation in the blocked heading, and few men unaccustomed to that task could have worked at all.

In the meanwhile the men of the other shift had ap-

peared. As it happened, Neilson's messenger had met them at the shaft-head, for the engineer had blown his horn, and they were becoming used to falls of rock at Long Divide. As each man dropped back, worn out, from the working face, another replaced him, and there was no slackening in the clatter of the shovels and the jar of the picks. Behind the point of attack half-naked, gasping figures, that appeared and vanished in and between the uncertain shafts of light, rolled great stones, or flung them crashing into tubs; and all toiled with a fiercer energy when at length a stream of water broke out from the slowly-yielding mass. That was the one thing that each had most feared. A little later, however, Neilson raised his hand, and their hearts stirred within them as in the sudden quietness they heard a faint, dull knocking. One of them cried out in his relief, but Neilson, turning, flung a sharp glance at him.

"You can pull that stone out. It would be more to the purpose," he said. "Boys, you have still quite a pile of dirt to shift."

They realized this, and worked even harder than before, for it was clear that the water must be rising fast where their comrades were behind the barrier. The ominous gush had broken out a foot or two above the floor level, and that had its significance for them. Still, the tunnel was low and narrow, and the man who grasped the pick had scarcely room to swing it without injuring his companion who plied the shovel; and in spite of their most determined efforts their progress was horribly slow.

Man replaced man the moment overtaxed muscle failed to respond to the insistent call on it, for, as delay was perilous, it was essential that the attack should be sustained with the utmost vigor. Soil-stained, bespattered objects dripping with sweat ran forward, seized great fragments of rock, and vanished into the

gloom; trucks went clattering and clanging to the rear; and the clink of pick and shovel mingled with the crash of falling stone. Every now and then Neilson's voice rose sharply through the confused sounds, but with that exception no one spoke. The men gasped with the effort, but they worked in grim silence, with set faces, and resolution in their eyes. They were up against it, as they say in that country, but though the odds were heavy they meant to win.

It was not the first time that most of them had looked death in the face, or had snatched a comrade from his closing grasp. They had driven logs down roaring rapids, springing with the long pike-poles across the plunging trunks; they had delved out shallow mineral claims through treacherous gravel or amid inrushing sand; they had thawed out their giant-powder at open fires among the ice-grazed crags. They and their kind did these things lightly, as in a general way they spent their money, for they were the indomitable, generous, all-enduring free-lances that are termed in that province—the boys.

As the hours slipped by the blood trickled from the hands of some among them, and there were bruises upon the naked flesh of many of the rest. This was no time to be particular or to consider a trifling hazard; and they tore out ragged masses of rock with wounded fingers, and staggered to the tubs with ponderous fragments clasped in corded arms or pressed against unprotected breasts. Stones rolled down on the shovelers' feet or fell on scarred and reddened hands; but nobody heeded that, for every now and then the muffled knocking rose from behind the barrier, a little clearer and more insistent than it had been when they had heard it last.

Whether it was morning yet above they neither knew nor cared; but at length, when the knocking had grown plainer still, there was a crash and one man's

pick sank out of sight in a black opening as he struck a swinging blow. The others swarmed about him, tore at the stones he dare no longer strike, and madly flung them down. There was a cry from the other side of the barrier, and the pick-man, dropping to hands and knees, wriggled into the cavity like a badger. After that a tense silence reigned until his voice came out of the darkness.

"Hustle!" he cried. "They're most waist-deep, and it's rising fast! Big stone's slipped a little and jammed up the hole!"

After that there was no more order in the attack. It degenerated into frenzied effort, and pick-man and tub-man and shovel-hand jostled and strove with one another for the foremost place. For once Neilson was not heeded, and when he would have held some of his followers back by force he was roughly flung aside. The whole mass was rolling down among them, the roof that had been supported by it was evidently following, but they cared nothing then for any peril. It was a work of mercy in which they were engaged, but they were filled with fierce, primitive passion, fired with a crude and brutal valor that would have driven them headlong without tools or machines into the maddest elemental grapple with roaring flood or unyielding rock. Man at close grip with nature is not, as a rule, a dainty, or, in some respects, an edifying spectacle—bedeviled, sweating, grimly silent or scattering blistering comments with tight-drawn breath, according to his temperament. It is, however, then that his sovereignty over the gross material world and all that moves in it is most clearly made apparent. There are also times in the stress of the struggle when one can dimly see on what high ancient warrant he holds that sovereignty.

In the meanwhile the barrier was crashing down, until at last it seemed to break up and crumble sud-

denly, and its assailants floundered waist-deep in the rush of water, stones and débris that swirled by them down the gallery. Then a fierce, hoarse shout of triumph rang through the black tunnel as wild, dripping figures clambered over the last of the stones and came out into the light, free and safe.

Neilson called one man and, lifting down a lamp, walked back up the gallery. It was blocked again a little farther up, and he stood still a while, looking about him, before he asked his companion a few concise questions. After that he went back to the shaft and saw that the sun had swung up above the hillside when he stepped out of the tub. He was wet and worn out, and now felt a little dazed; but he walked to his office, and sitting down in it lighted a cigar when he had laid out a sheet of paper on the table. It was necessary to think, and the most important question was how the news of this trouble would affect Carteret.

In the first place, the matter was not in itself a very serious one. Nobody had been badly hurt, and, though the work would no doubt be costly, the heading could be cleared out again, and so timbered and supported as to render further falls of rock at least unlikely, while, if it appeared imperatively necessary, the whole arrangements for extracting the ore could be changed. On the other hand, it was, he surmised, very probable that the prospect of a considerable increase in expenses would have a disheartening effect on the shareholders and might provide Carteret's opponents with a further reason for urging liquidation. As the meeting would be held very shortly and the mail was despatched only at rather long intervals from the nearest settlement, it seemed to him that he might, perhaps, hold back the news; but against this there was the probability that in case he adopted the latter course his reasons for doing so would afterward become apparent if Carteret should

be forced to relinquish his control. Besides, he was not quite sure that it would not be wiser to acquaint Carteret with the facts and leave him to deal with the situation.

At length he took up his pen and carefully weighed every word he used, as the letter might be submitted to the shareholders at the meeting. Then he sent for a man he could rely on and handed the sealed envelope to him.

"Set off for the settlement immediately after breakfast, Dave," he directed. "Hire a horse at Critchley's ranch and go on to Vancouver by the first train. Give this letter into Carteret's hand—that's important. If he's out when you reach his hotel you must ask where he is and go after him."

The man took the letter, and shortly afterward plodded away down the trail, while Neilson, weary as he was, set the men who were capable of it to work clearing out and building supporting pillars in the heading.

CHAPTER XXIX

CARTERET'S TRIUMPH

IT was the day of the stockholders' meeting, and Carteret was sitting at a little table in the smoking-room of the C.P.R. Hotel at Vancouver after lunch, when Nettleton walked in. The latter sat down near his colleague and glanced round the room. It was well filled just then, for the Pacific express from Montreal had arrived a little while earlier, but there was nobody whom Nettleton recognized among the groups of passengers. He looked at Carteret and noticed that his face was unusually thoughtful. That, however, was only what he had expected.

"Anything fresh?" he asked.

"No," answered Carteret. "It's just possible that I may hear from the English lawyer that he has obtained authority to assume the death of Sydney Carteret, in which case I quite expect the support of his successors. Though the thing was, perhaps, a little informal and premature, I sent them the proxies. The man's last letter was encouraging. In the meanwhile my clerk's at the post-office waiting while they sort out the mail. I'm expecting him at any moment."

Nettleton nodded.

"It's going to be a very close thing if you don't get those proxies," he said. "I sent one of my clerks round to examine the registers at the hotels and a good many of the stockholders have come in. As

far as I can remember, at least half of them are men who were in favor of liquidation or strict retrenchment at the previous meeting, and it seems logical to suppose that they'll back Brough's proposition now."

He took a list of names from his pocket, and Carteret made a sign of concurrence when he read them out.

"Yes," he admitted grimly, "there'll be a very determined opposition. That's certain, anyway. Did anybody else come in by the Pacific express to-day?"

"I was at the station and recognized three or four of the smaller men. They're among those we have decided that Brough is counting on."

A minute or two later Carteret looked up sharply as his clerk came in. He carried a big sealed package, and laid a single letter bearing an English stamp on the table.

"There's nothing else that needs your attention, sir," he said.

Carteret tore open the envelope and his face grew graver.

"We won't get the English proxies," he announced. "The inquiry is adjourned until I can send my man some further attested statements. I'm not sure that I'll waste any further trouble over the matter."

He turned to the clerk.

"Take those papers over to the secretary and say that we'll be across very shortly."

The clerk went out, and Carteret leaned back in his chair.

"I'm worried about it, Nettleton, and that's a fact," he confessed. "In some respects, of course, the matter's not a very serious one—if I had to throw all my stock away I could face that trouble—but it's quite a few years since I've been so anxious about anything. You see, for one thing, as perhaps I've told you, I have set my heart on making Long Divide a prosperous

mine, and, what is more to the purpose, I can do it if the opposition is not too strong for me. I just want to keep hold, say another twelve months, until I've seen the thing an accomplished fact, and then I'll drop out willingly. In the meanwhile I have the strongest objections to being beaten in what will probably be my last fight. The thing would be almost intolerably galling."

His companion made a little gesture of sympathy.

"After all," he said quietly, "we're not beaten yet. Have you got that report from Neilson?"

"It hasn't arrived," answered Carteret. "I wish it had. There's no doubt that if I could lay any further encouraging information before them it would have some influence with the stockholders. I don't know why he hasn't sent it."

He broke off and said nothing further for some minutes, but Nettleton could fully sympathize with him. Carteret had long been known as a successful man, and there was no doubt that he derived a certain satisfaction from the fact. Now, however, when he had gradually relinquished the control of the various ventures he had set on foot, it was conceivable that he would find it a painful thing if he should be compelled to retire, defeated and discredited, from the one that had been his favorite.

At length Nettleton rose.

"We may as well go across," he suggested. "They'll be ready for us when we get there."

They left the hotel together, and it was some time later when they entered a big room at the top of a tall stone building. It was very hot that afternoon, and as the windows were wide open the clang of the trolley-cars came up from the street below and the tolling of a locomotive bell rang across the clustering roofs from the side-tracks behind the wharf. Carteret, who was chairman, sat down at the middle of a table, with

the secretary at his side and the rest of the directors near, and cast a swift and searching glance round the room.

The Long Divide was by no means a big company, but a good many of its stockholders had attended the meeting. Some of them were business men, but there were others whose dress and bronzed faces proclaimed them to be more or less prosperous ranchers and fruit-growers from the bush. A few were talking together in little groups, the rest sat apart, but there was expectation, doubt or resolution in most of their faces. Carteret was quick to recognize the hint of tension in the general appearance of the assembly, and he was quite aware that there was trouble on hand. It was not the first time that he had been called upon to face determined opposition, and the signs were plain to him.

Soon after he sat down a clerk who had been left at the door entered the room and walked toward the table. Failing to secure the attention of Carteret, whom he could not reach without disturbing some of the others, he touched Brough on the shoulder. Brough rose, and going out with him found a man, who appeared to be a miner, waiting in an ante-room, where another man also sat. The clerk indicated the miner.

"He has a letter from Long Divide for Mr. Carteret, sir. He wouldn't give it to me."

"Then I'll take it in to him," said Brough.

The miner appeared unwilling to part with it.

"I'm to give it into his own hands. That's what boss Neilson said."

Brough glanced round and saw that the clerk had left them.

"Mr. Carteret can't be disturbed just now. As a matter of fact, that letter should be handed to the secretary. Give it to me."

"No, sir," persisted the miner, "it sure can't be done. If Mr. Carteret's busy I'll wait until I can hand it to him."

Brough thought rapidly. He had reasons for supposing that Neilson's sympathies were with his opponent, and he had a shrewd suspicion that the letter contained information of a nature likely to win Carteret the support of wavering shareholders. Since the rival forces were very evenly balanced, it was clear that any odds in Carteret's favor would in all probability enable him to carry the meeting. Admitting this, he decided that it was advisable that the letter should not reach Carteret just then, and, as it happened, the man's uncompromising attitude made it easier to keep it away from him.

"Well," he said, "I have told you that I'll take it in to him, but I can't, of course, insist if you won't give it to me."

The man repeated that he would not do this, and Brough went away. It was scarcely likely that Carteret would hear anything of the letter until after the meeting, and though there was no doubt that he would guess what his opponent's motive had been, he would have some difficulty in substantiating his views on the subject, even if he considered it worth while.

Soon after Brough resumed his seat the secretary read the minutes of the previous meeting, and then the balance-sheet was submitted. This called forth a good deal of somewhat acrimonious discussion, and several very pointed and rather personal questions were flung at Carteret, who smiled. When it had eventually been agreed to, he rose and explained that two of the directors whom he named retired by rotation, and must either be reelected or two others chosen to replace them. His voice was quietly formal, though he was anxious about the result, for the retiring men were supporters of his; and he recognized that the crisis was

at hand when two others were immediately nominated. Most of the assembly were somewhat hot and flushed in face, and several had evidently lost their temper. Then Brough stood up.

"Mr. Chairman and gentlemen," he began, "I think in this case it would be reasonable to suggest a departure from the usual course. Several most important proposals are to be laid before you, and it appears highly desirable that you should hear them and be informed of the directors' intentions in regard to them before you proceed to an election."

There were cries of support from at least half of those present, and expressions of disgust and anger when, with the secretary's concurrence, Carteret ruled the suggestion out of order. Then he sat quietly still for a few moments while the rival candidates drew apart with their backers. He knew that it was highly desirable for him to retain his collectedness and usual tranquillity.

There was an open window near him and he could look down, across the clustering roofs of the city and the maze of wires high aloft on such tremendous poles as could be cut only from the redwoods of the Pacific Slope, upon the big Empress liner at the wharf. She was beautiful in outline and immaculately white, and behind her the wide, blue inlet stretched away to the hills that towered into a crystalline sky. It seemed to have no entrance, for the tall black pines shrouded all the Narrows, but big, four-masted ships rode here and there, and there was a gleam of snowy sail-cloth against the forest where two schooners came creeping in, while broad across the twinkling water hung the dusky smoke-trail from the Hastings mills. Carteret noticed it all. It was, he felt, anxious as he was, a city to be proud of—one in which he had made his mark—and looking down on it he braced himself for his last battle.

Then they proceeded to a vote; and he knew that things were going against him when he declared the two new men elected. There was a rather awkward pause after that, and the whole assembly sat expectantly still when he motioned to them for attention.

"I have a project to lay before you which, under the constitution of this company, cannot be proceeded with unless with your assent," he said. "I urge you to grant it, but first of all the secretary will read you ampler details of our last few months' operations."

The secretary took up a paper, and they listened with close interest to a concise statement of the cost of extracting and reducing so many tons of ore. Then there followed details of the yield of copper and silver attested by the manager of the reducing plant, and a copy of the sale notes.

"I need say very little," added Carteret. "You can see for yourselves what the very desirable margin between the cost of mining and the market price is. I must, however, point out that we are now pushing the new heading into a very large body of ore of at least as high a grade."

There was no doubt that a number of them found the statement convincing, and some showed it by their applauding murmurs; but the rest appeared sardonically incredulous. Some knew by hearsay, and some from painful experience, that the reports read at mining meetings are usually cast in an optimistic vein, and are not always subsequently borne out by facts. In fact, on the face of it, the thing looked almost too good to be true. A few had pointed questions to ask, but Carteret answered quietly, and it presently became evident that some of the opposition were wavering. He saw it and made a strong appeal.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you cannot get behind these figures. They are not forecasts, but deal with actual results. I do not call the latter encouraging, since that

refers to the future. They are at the moment substantially gratifying. Now, as I have not attempted to hide, the cost of getting out the ore with our present system is high, and we are compelled to work on a restricted scale. I have to propose the issue of sufficient ordinary stock to provide a remedy for the difficulty."

He set forth the benefits to be derived from the suggested course, and then glancing toward one of the stockholders, who seconded the proposal, he saw a man whom he had not noticed earlier sitting behind the speaker. He rested one elbow on the back of the chair in front of him, and part of his face was hidden by his hand, but there was something vaguely familiar about him. Carteret had, however, very little attention to spare for him just then, for Brough stood up, and Carteret was keenly anxious to hear all he had to say.

He spoke for several minutes with passionate force, making light, with veiled innuendos, of the figures he could not controvert, forecasting difficulties and eventual disaster from the constant fall of rock and influx of water.

"Long Divide has only twice paid you a few cents on the dollar," he concluded. "You can hardly give your stock away. You have not been told of some three or four thousand dollars lately earned, which will infallibly be swallowed up in the next serious collapse, and you will certainly have to double the cost of pumping. Then it is positively certain that we could not float the new stock at par. Most of it would have to be underwritten at a heavy discount. You would incur full liability, and get only a part of the money. In fact, I have no hesitation in characterizing the project as impossible; and with this conviction I move the immediate liquidation of the company."

His face was flushed and perspiring when he broke off, and there rose a storm of cries. Some of them

supported him, others were rudely hostile, and once more sharp questions were asked across the room.

"How are you going to liquidate it?" inquired one man. "If the ore can't be worked you have only got the engine and the pumps. What are they going to bring you if you sell them second-hand?"

Brough waved his hand for silence. As it happened, the question had given him the lead that he desired.

"I have here a proposition from the famous Crestwick combine," he said. "I will ask the secretary to read it to you, and, as you will hear, they formally offer to take over all the Long Divide property, paying for it at a stated proportion of every dollar's worth of stock. Whether they will get their money back is another matter, but they have the command of capital and the advice of highly-paid and trained experts which will enable them to face an outlay and undertake operations on a scale that would be impossible to us."

The secretary read the letter, and once more a clamor broke out. Some of the men strove to shout Brough down; some of them urged him on; but it was clear to Carteret, who sat grim in face and very still, that the tide was turning against him when there were calls for a vote.

"I will put Mr. Brough's amendment—that the company go into liquidation and a committee be appointed to arrange matters with the Crestwick combine—first," he said. "The secretary, who has the stock register, will record the votes of those in favor of this proposition."

Man after man voted for the amendment, and Carteret's heart sank. Then soon after he asked for those against it he started as the man he had already noticed sitting at the back stood up, for there was no doubt whatever that it was his hired hand, Jardine. He leaned forward suddenly in his chair, wondering

what this might mean, until what appeared to be a wholly fantastic solution flashed into his mind.

"Name?" cried the secretary.

"Sydney Jardine Carteret," was the clear answer.

Carteret closed one hand tight, but a grim smile crept into his eyes, and he saw relief in Nettleton's face as he looked at him. Then there was a murmur of astonishment, and Brough sprang to his feet.

"I must ask for a strict inquiry. Sydney Carteret is reported to be dead," he exclaimed.

Sydney turned to the assembly with a whimsical gesture.

"Gentlemen," he said, "that really seems a little improbable."

There was a burst of rather strained laughter, followed by a sudden silence, and it was evident that the whole assembly were waiting in tense expectancy when Brough spoke again. His face was suffused with blood and his voice was hoarse, but it was clear that he would not admit defeat just yet.

"I adhere to my statement, and I will read you a clipping from *The Colonist* in support of it," he cried.

They listened to him eagerly, though some of them had already read the account of the accident. Then the secretary looked at Carteret, who appeared to authorize him to speak.

"Sydney Jardine Carteret is registered as holder of a considerable block of stock, and, in face of the newspaper report, Mr. Brough's demand for an investigation appears necessary." He turned to Sydney. "Are you in possession of the stock certificate?"

Sydney quietly walked up to the table and smiled at Carteret as he handed the secretary a telegram.

"I lodged it with a well-known Montreal bank on my arrival in Canada," he replied. "Foreseeing the difficulties which have just been raised, I wired them for a statement to that effect. This is their answer."

The secretary read it aloud, and when Carteret glanced at Sydney there was something in his expression that sent a thrill of satisfaction through the latter. Then Sydney turned to the assembly.

"Gentlemen," he said, "though the proceeding may appear rather informal, I should like permission to bring in the Mr. Hilton already mentioned to assure you as to my identity."

Brough's objections were drowned in the clamor of assent; and Sydney, leaving the room for a moment, came back with Hilton. The latter moved toward the directors' table and stood near it, facing the assembly.

"Knowing what is required of me I will be brief; but first of all I must say that I have made a statement similar to the one to which I shall ask your attention before a magistrate in the Okanagan country and in the presence of a Vancouver notary to-day," he said, handing the secretary two papers. "When the landslide broke away down the range I was carrying a satchel containing a little shooting diary with Carteret's name on it, which he had given to me, and I discovered later that I had let the satchel fall in the scramble. It is possible that the strap gave way. My Indian guide was some distance in front of me, and we were running for our lives. He plunged into the forest, and shortly afterward I did the same. When the landslide had gone by there was no sign of him, but it was clear that he had not been killed, and I endeavored to strike the trail that we were heading for. I failed to find it, however, and must have overshot the Morland settlement in the bush, for it was late the next evening when I reached the railroad. As there was a train just due I went on with it, without, as far as I can remember, mentioning the landslide to anybody. There were a number of trail-choppers leaving just then, which probably explains why I evidently escaped notice. I bought a ranch in the Okan-

agan country, and as I did not read a Provincial paper for the first two months I heard nothing of the supposed death of Carteret. Very lately I wrote asking him if he would visit me, and he wired me to come here immediately and identify him. I have now pleasure in testifying that I met him in the mountains in the early spring, and was told that he was Sydney Carteret. I saw him receive letters in that name, and there can, to my mind, be no doubt whatever on the subject."

It was evident that most of the others agreed with him, and one of the men spoke.

"It seems to me that Sydney Carteret should be permitted to vote."

"I can submit another piece of evidence," announced Sydney. "I was paid a thousand dollars at a bank in this city shortly after the supposititious accident."

He mentioned the name of the bank, and the secretary, asking permission to go to the telephone, came back a minute or two later.

"I am informed that Sydney Jardine Carteret was handed a thousand dollars in person," he said.

They decided that Sydney had enforced his claim; and when the votes were counted Carteret faced the meeting with a smile.

"My resolution authorizing the directors to raise further capital will now be read to you."

It was voted for amid tense suspense, and carried. Carteret cast a single glance at Sydney and then leaned back somewhat heavily in his chair. He had won, but the strain of the last half-hour was telling on him.

"I wish to assure you that you have done wisely, gentlemen," he said a few moments later. "We have certainly several rather serious difficulties to contend with, but the quality of the ore we are getting out is sufficient to cover unusually heavy expenses and leave a handsome margin."

There was a little further discussion, and then the meeting broke up. When the room had almost emptied, Brough and Sydney approached the table where Carteret was still sitting.

"You have beaten us," admitted Brough. "I suppose I have just got to put up with it, though I did what I could to turn the scale against you. In the meanwhile I want to say that there's a man from Long Divide outside who brought a letter for you."

"Just arrived?" asked Carteret, dryly.

"No," answered Brough. "The fact is he has been here some time. He wouldn't give the letter to any one but you."

Carteret made a sign of comprehension.

"No doubt you agreed to that. I'll ask him for it."

He went out. Coming back with Neilson's letter opened, he smiled as he handed it to Brough.

"I'm inclined to think that this letter would have been worth a few votes to you if you had enabled me to get it when it was brought," he said. "I should have felt it my duty to submit it to my colleagues, who would no doubt have had it read to the meeting."

Brough's face was still somewhat red, but he contrived to laugh.

"Yes," he admitted, "it would have been wiser."

Then Sydney turned to him.

"I have to thank Mr. Brough for another little favor," he asserted. "He obtained me employment at a mine in the ranges, and the manager seemed so bent on keeping me, presumably until this meeting was over, that I had considerable difficulty in getting away. I understand that my wages are to be held back because I left, and I should like to ask Mr. Brough what he intends to do in the matter?"

Carteret looked at the defeated man and smiled.

"I have no doubt that you were acquainted with his identity when you visited the ranch."

Brough made a sign of assent.

"I put up the toughest fight I could, but, as usual, you have come out on top, and I have only this to say. As I hold quite a block of Long Divide stock, and it's possible that you can make the mine pay after all, I've no intention of raising any further trouble." He turned to Sydney. "Those wages will be paid you."

He went out; and Sydney was conscious of a certain embarrassment when he and Carteret were left alone together.

"Well," said the elder man, sharply, "I'm certainly indebted to you; but may I ask your reasons for the whole masquerade?"

Sydney explained them as best he could, and Carteret appeared to reflect.

"It's convincing in some respects," he admitted. "On the other hand, there are still one or two points that are not quite clear to me."

He favored Sydney with a curiously searching glance, and for a moment the latter hesitated. Then he looked the elder man steadily in the eyes.

"Perhaps I would better tell you, sir, that I had made up my mind that if by any means it could be made possible I would marry Miss Carteret some day."

"Ah," said Carteret, dryly, "I wonder whether you have any idea what her views on that subject are?"

Sydney flushed, but he answered quietly.

"It almost seems that she would be content, if we could obtain your sanction."

Carteret sat still for a minute with a thoughtful face, and then looked up again.

"I presume your ostensible means of supporting her are represented by this block of shares?"

"Yes, sir," replied Sydney. "Still, I venture to believe I shall somehow contrive to double them presently."

"Well," responded Carteret with a smile, "I fancy that state of affairs could be altered, and in the first place I venture to predict that the result you desire could be brought about within the coming twelve months by merely leaving those shares alone. Anyway, we can talk over the matter later on, and with that in view you might come down to the ranch with me to-morrow."

The blood swept into Sydney's face, and he could feel his heart beating exultantly.

"May I telegraph that news to Miss Carteret, sir?"

"Yes," laughed Carteret. "I think you could go—so far. In the meanwhile, however, you are not authorized to go any farther."

Sydney left him soon after this, and he and Hilton and the man from Long Divide held a feast that evening. On the morrow he started for the ranch with Carteret, and though his companion confined his conversation to mining matters during the journey, he called Sydney to his room and sent for Clare shortly after they arrived.

"It seems that you would be content to marry Sydney?" he inquired when she came in.

"Yes," replied Clare, simply.

"In spite of the fact that he is by no means overburdened with money?"

"That wouldn't count in the least."

"Well," said Carteret, with a twinkle in his eyes, "there was a time when I had looked forward—in case neither of you objected—to giving you to him, and I see no very strong reason for changing my mind now." He turned to Sydney. "I suppose, if it appeared advisable, you would be willing to fill my place as a director of the Long Divide?"

Sydney started with astonishment; and when he expressed his unalloyed satisfaction with the prospect, Carteret nodded.